

Photo by kind permission of Major R. Whitbread.

#### SHILLUK HAIR-DRESSING.

The final result of the repulsive custom described is clearly seen. The whole effect is produced by arranging the hair with the aid of cow-dung pomade.

# SAVAGE LIFE IN THE BLACK SUDAN

AN ACCOUNT OF AN ADVENTUROUS JOURNEY OF EXPLORATION  
AMONGST WILD & LITTLE-KNOWN TRIBES INHABITING  
SWAMPS, DENSE FORESTS, MOUNTAIN-TOPS & ARID  
DESERTS HITHERTO ALMOST UNKNOWN, WITH A  
DESCRIPTION OF THEIR MANNER OF  
LIVING, SECRET SOCIETIES &  
MYSTERIOUS & BARBARIC  
RITES.

BY

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"AMONG WILD TRIBES OF THE AMAZONS,"

"THE REAL SOUTH AMERICA,"

&c., &c., &c.

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# Savage Life in the Black Sudan

## CHAPTER I

### In Kordofan & the Bahr-el-Ghazal

**A**LTHOUGH, primarily, this book deals with travel, exploration and adventure in Kordofan, the Bahr-el-Ghazal and Dar Nuba, among some of the most curious, revolting and still savage races of mankind, it has purposes subsidiary to these geographical and ethnological studies. While making a series of journeys, covering over 3000 miles, and penetrating into the heart of the Black Sudan, during 1925-6, I traversed much of the big game country, and discovered, among other things, that contrary to general belief slave raiding has by no means entirely ceased along the Abyssinian border, or on the Arab-Negro frontier to the south of the great Nubian Desert; that there are to-day races of savages whose secret retreat lies in and around the world's greatest swamp; that native warfare is of frequent occurrence; that ivory raiders cause great loss of life, amongst both black and white; that in the wild Nuba Mountains there are areas into which no white man has ever been; that vast herds of big game, often totalling



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200 to 300 head, still roam the open country almost unmolested—and that down in the “blue” of Equatoria there are black secret societies whose debaucheries are too awful for description. In short, I discovered, much to my surprise, that there are regions in Central Africa to-day which have advanced but little since the time of Baker, Stanley, Livingstone, Park, Petherick, Schweinfurth, Gessi, Junker and other explorers of the sixties, seventies and eighties.

The ancient history of the Northern Sudan can now be fairly accurately traced back for over 2800 years, thanks very largely to the discoveries made by Dr. Reisner, Dr. MacIver and other devoted archæologists. It corresponds to the region called *Kush* by the Ancient Egyptians and *Ethiopia* by classical geographers. Apart, however, from this desert region and its long story—a territory with which this work is not directly concerned except as the gateway through which all travellers must pass on their way to the interior—there are the huge regions stretching away southwards from the edge of the Nubian Desert into Central Africa. The portions of this territory, having a total area of nearly 600,000 square miles, which formed the scene of my operations are known as Kordofan, the Dar Nuba, the White Nile, the Upper Nile and the Bahr-el-Ghazal, which, taken collectively, are nearly three times the size of Great Britain, and equal in area to the States of New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Illinois and California.

About the early inhabitants of Kordofan very little

is definitely known, although it is considered probable that a large proportion of the original population were Nuba, the ancestors of those who now inhabit the mountains of that southern *Dar* (country) which is geographically a portion of Kordofan. Investigations among these fierce people of the mountain-tops have caused me to believe, however, that they came originally from the banks of the Nile, in Nubia, and are the true descendants of the Ancient Egyptians.

However this may be, the earliest settlers in Kordofan of whom there is any definite record are the Dagu, a race of negro-pagans who came from the East during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Remnants of this tribe are still to be found near Abu Zabad, Jebel Dago and in the Messeria country, living in a state of vassalage to different Arab chiefs.

Towards the end of the fifteenth century the powerful Fung tribes, who had established the native kingdom of Sennar, invaded and conquered the Gezira—the land between the Blue and the White Niles, near their confluence. The chain-mailed warriors of the Fung horsemen also penetrated into Kordofan, and from this invasion may be traced the Bederia, Gawama and Ghodiat tribes, now inhabiting portions of the vast plains of this great region. A few years later the Baggara overran the whole country, coming south-east from the Berber kingdoms.

For many years Kordofan, which formed a kind of buffer territory and the only break in the chain of independent and barbaric kingdoms which stretched



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across this portion of Central Africa, including those of Kanem, Bornu, Wadai, Bagirmi, Darfur and Sennar, was regarded as a portion of one or other of the two latter states, according to the balance of power. In the year 1776, however, there came into prominence the Sultan Hashim of the Musabaat, whose capital was at El Obeid. About ten years later occurred the invasion of the Kungara of Darfur, who eventually made themselves masters of the country. Little is known about subsequent events until the Egyptian invasion in 1821.

Then came the first important incident in the modern history of Kordofan, the rise of the Mahdi, in 1883. This regime of isolation and barbarism effectually closed the whole Sudan to both explorers and historians, and in a state of darkness this immense country remained until its reconquest by the Anglo-Egyptian Army in 1898.

It is interesting to note here that in the year 1865 Sir Samuel Baker established a post for the suppression of the slave trade near Fashoda, in the Shilluk country. In 1874 General Charles Gordon arrived in the Sudan, and a rising of the Shilluks was crushed by Gessi Pasha, his Italian lieutenant. Then Kordofan was visited by the Prout Expedition in 1875-6, by General Gordon in 1877 and by Slatin Pasha in 1878. The dawn of civilization was, however, to be delayed until more recent years, for during the Mahdia the whole country remained a forbidden land, and only emerged from the darkness in 1900-10. Many

parts of the Dar Nuba still remain quite unknown.

About the early history of the Bahr-el-Ghazal absolutely nothing is known. The Dinka tribes of the north appear to have occupied their territories for many centuries. In the south, the Azande overran the country about 200 years ago ; and, in the west, the Feroge and Ngulguli peoples conquered the Kreich, Banda and other supposedly aboriginal tribes. The descendants of both conquerors and conquered are still to be found in the equatorial forests and swamps.

Although an expedition sent by Mohammed Ali from Egypt in 1840 reached the mouth of the Ghazal River, in Lake No, further progress was stopped by the *Sudd*, or great swamp. It is generally believed that the first vessel from the north to navigate the upper reaches of the Ghazal River belonged to a Khartoum ivory trader and made the journey in 1854. In the following year, however, John Petherick, also an ivory trader from Khartoum, penetrated as far as Meshra-el-Rek, but was forced to retreat by the hostility of the natives.

Among other European travellers who subsequently visited different parts of this wild region must be mentioned Rollet, Poncet (1859), the ill-fated Tinné expedition (1863), Miani (1872), Piaggia (1874), Potagos (1876), Schweinfurth (1868-71), Junker (1875-83) and Gessi (1878).

Then came the severance of all communication with



the outside world by the Mahdist Revolt in the far north. The whole of this vast region, about twice the size of Great Britain, became the slaving ground of Arab raiders. It is stated that 80,000 slaves were annually captured and sent in gangs all over tropical Africa and across the Red Sea, or Indian Ocean, to Arabia. In 1874 Gordon succeeded in establishing a chain of Nile posts for the purpose of checking in some degree the export of slaves by way of this great river. Between 1874 and 1880 Romolo Gessi, the son of an Italian lawyer and political exile in Constantinople, who was entrusted with the task by Gordon, tried hard, with a mere handful of coloured troops and friendlies, to capture the zeribas which had been established in many parts of the country by the Arab slave raiders. Eventually, however, worn with disease, this brave Italian left the Ghazal, after a three months' endeavour to extricate his little vessel from the swamps. He died at Suez in the following year (1881).

Lupton Bey, an ex-mercantile marine officer, carried on the work for some years until the Mahdi Revolt cut off all communication from the north. This portion of Africa, in common with the adjoining territories to the east, west and north, lapsed into complete barbarism, and from this condition it is only now slowly emerging, thanks to the untiring efforts and self-sacrifice of a handful of British officers.

Then came the French advance towards the Nile from their sphere in the Congo. Examined on its



merits as a feat of exploration, there can be no doubt that these efforts were extremely praiseworthy; but, politically, they were indefensible, and came to a just termination when Colonel Kitchener hastened down the White Nile and met Captain Marchand, the French explorer and representative, at Fashoda in the year 1898. Several British expeditions followed, notably that of Lieutenant Scott Barbour, who was treacherously murdered by the Agar-Dinkas in January, 1902. Since then administrative posts have been established in many parts of this territory; but large areas of country still remain *terra incognita*.

Although it would be both tedious and unnecessary to give here anything more than the above brief outline of the history of exploration in these still wild regions, a general survey of the vast country we are about to enter may enable the reader to approach Central Africa with some idea of its inaccessibility, vastness and peculiarities.

The total area of the Sudan is approximately 1,007,500 square miles, making it about the size of British India, and the estimated population is a little over 6,000,000. There are, however, two zones, divided roughly by the 11th and 12th parallels of latitude. North of this line the country for the most part consists of waterless deserts, the eastern extremity of the great Sahara. To the south of the 12th parallel lie the vast and only semi-explored mountains, plains, forests and swamps of Equatorial Africa, with a rainfall which increases as the equator is approached.

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Khartoum, in Lat.  $15^{\circ} 36'$  N., has about 5 inches annually; Kodok (468 miles south), in Lat.  $9^{\circ} 53'$  N., gets 29 inches; Wau, in Lat.  $7^{\circ} 42'$  N., has 42 inches; and Mongalla (1066 miles south of Khartoum), in Lat.  $5^{\circ} 12'$  N., has from 39 to 43 inches in the year. The belt of territory, about 100 to 150 miles wide, which lies between the desert and the tropical zone, also forms the dividing line of the nomadic Arabs—here consisting mostly of wild, Baggara horsemen—and the negroid races of Central Africa.

The southernmost town of importance is Khartoum, the administrative headquarters of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, which is situated on the spit of land at the confluence of the Blue and White Niles. On the opposite bank, only two miles distant, stands the great native city of Omdurman, the historic town of mud walls which saw so much cruelty and bloodshed in the days of the Mahdia. Although Khartoum, from the European standpoint, is the most southerly town in this portion of Africa, and in it are the last civilized shops, stores and hotels, it is really situated in the Northern Sudan—so vast is the area of the zone which stretches away for 1200 miles southwards to Uganda and the Belgian Congo, eastwards for 1000 miles to Lake Rudolf and Southern Abyssinia, and westwards a distance of over 1000 miles to French Equatorial Africa.

To reach this last outpost of civilized life, which must necessarily form the main base of all expeditions into the interior, involves a journey—albeit a most



comfortable and interesting one—by rail and river from Cairo of 1356 miles, or, as an alternative, from Port Sudan, by way of the wild Red Sea Hills, over the fine Sudan railway system, a distance of just under 500 miles. The traveller who arrives in Khartoum with the idea that he is within week-end distance of savage tribes and big game will be sadly disappointed, for this city of Gordon and Kitchener is at the beginning of the long trail which may end anywhere within a radius of one or two thousand miles. In my own case it formed a base of operations for expeditions to the south-east, south and south-west. The first was merely a reconnaissance towards the Abyssinian frontier; the second led me into the great forests and swamps of Equatorial Africa; while the third objective was the little-known Nuba Mountains in Southern Kordofan.

With the northern deserts we are here concerned only in so far as these incomprehensibly vast, dazzling, mirage-encompassed and sandstorm-scourged wastes, with the greatest native city in all Africa near their southern border, form the only practicable gateway into what has been aptly termed the "Savage Sudan." Utterly to ignore this long approach to the real starting-point, so far as this story of events is concerned, and to plunge straight into remote regions, hundreds of miles further south, would be not only misleading, but might leave any reader who happens to be without local knowledge with the unsatisfactory feeling of being entirely "at sea."



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To describe, in all its primitive nakedness, something of what I saw along the desert, river and jungle roads into Equatorial Africa would therefore seem to be subsidiary only to an account of life among the native tribes. These races of the savage Sudan include the giant Shilluks, seldom less than 6 or 7 feet in height, who dress their hair in such elaborate style that they have to sleep with only their necks supported by wooden trestles, and whose customs are among the most curious and at times repulsive so far known to exist among savages.

The cult of Nyikwang, as practised by the Shilluks, is perhaps the most curious form of religion in the world, and about it very little has hitherto been generally known. Then there are the Dinkas, who smear themselves over with the burnt ash from cowdung fires and live principally on blood and milk. A portion of this tribe was, at the time of my arrival in their country, at war with the wild Nuers, whose propensity for raiding their less warlike neighbours and returning from these forays with slaves and cattle, has caused several expeditions to be despatched against them.

Among the many still wild tribes perhaps the spiritualistic Nubas deserve special mention. These queer hillmen, whose mountain and cave strongholds have defied the slave raiders of Kordofan for centuries, place their faith, both spiritual and medical, in *kujurs*, or high priests, who seek guidance through the medium of the trance. A wrestling match between two weirdly

decorated Nuba braves, or a dance of painted Nuba girls, certainly affords a most curious sight. Unfortunately these truculent hillmen are, on certain *jebels*, or hills, violently hostile to white men, whom they regard as Turks, without distinction of race. One of the first serious duties of the newly formed Sudan Defence Force was the despatch of a punitive expedition against one of these mountain strongholds while I was in the vicinity—a circumstance which, however necessary, did not contribute to my investigations because it rendered travel almost impossible in certain regions.

Previous to this, my first long African journey,<sup>1</sup> most of my travels and adventures had been in the unexplored regions of Equatorial South America, where, although the difficulties of transport, reliable information, carriers, thickness of forest undergrowth and all other obstacles placed by jealous Nature in the pathway of the explorer, are, in my humble judgment, far more insuperable, the savage tribes are much less numerous and more widely scattered and the big game more scanty and inaccessible than in the wild and still largely unexplored region lying between the great Sahara and the Nyanzas.

Here I must confess to a sweeping and somewhat misleading assertion in a previous book, wherein I stated that Africa was explored and subdued from Cairo to the Cape and Guardafui to Verde. Had I then the experience of the past months in the Bahr-el-Ghazal, Dar Nuba and around the Upper White

<sup>1</sup> In Uganda in 1912-13.



Nile, I should certainly have qualified this statement by saying that there are no longer any *vast* tracts of totally unexplored country, but that there are, nevertheless, many regions and places into which a white man, if he has ever been, has certainly never come out alive, and one of these places is the heart of the Sudd, another is among certain cave-strongholds of the Nubas; but doubtless there are many spots on the map of Africa which are to-day more inaccessible than these, even to the most ardent explorer.

In Africa almost every District Commissioner and commander of a frontier post carries forward in a slow, methodical and often unrecognized manner the great work of exploration; whereas in vast Amazonia there is apathy, often hostility, and everywhere lack of organized effort. In the "Lost Continent" between the Amazon and the Chaco there are not just circumscribed areas over which the word unknown can be truthfully written, but homogeneous regions the size of any European country.

The comparative smallness of the unexplored areas which, with those not yet completely subdued and civilized, form the "Darkest Africa" of to-day, does not indicate that there is nothing more to discover or that there is little of interest left. Both the unknown and the little known teem with unsolved geographical, ethnological and other problems. The native races are among the most unique and often fierce, suspicious and witch-bound in the world, and will continue to present, for many years to come, a



subject of unqualified interest to the student. Here, also, the seeker after adventure, if he is of the active variety, has unlimited scope.

Readers of my previous books, especially the one entitled *Among Wild Tribes of the Amazons*, will, early in the present narrative of events, recognize the totally different conditions which faced me in Kordofan, the Dar Nuba and the Bahr-el-Ghazal to those with which I had grappled in previous years on the more remote Brazilian rivers. While these same differences rendered me a novice in African travel and, at first, led me into many pitfalls, they supplied one of the objectives of my quest. It was to see for myself what resemblance, if any, African exploration bore to that now in progress in the great forests of Northern Brazil, to investigate the peculiar characteristics and customs of the strange tribes already mentioned and to collect certain information and data for the Government of the Sudan, so that it might be readily available for serious travellers and big game hunters, which lured me from the Upper Amazon to the Upper Nile.

## CHAPTER II

### The City of the Desert

**M**Y first day in the Sudan was spent in one of the most luxurious trains in the world, crossing a seemingly endless waste of sand broken only by a maddening procession of black stone hills, rising gaunt and steep from the lifeless, waterless plain. Far and wide over the Nubian Desert the sand was being blown like fine rain, although the sun beat down with pitiless fury on this virgin, untamed flank of the great Sahara. There are few places in the world more savage and cruel in aspect than this northern zone of the Sudan, entered, after the long journey of nearly 900 miles across Egypt, at the historic little riverside town of Halfa, the terminus of the Nile steamer service from Assouan.

The mirage, with its alluring lakes of cool, placid water, is the one relieving feature in a landscape which, during midday, seems intent upon burning itself into the memory for life. Relief comes when the sun sinks behind the bare hills, tinging the desert orange, red and purple. At night this dead land lies silver white under a brilliant moon, its curious hillocks of stone are sharply defined against the sky of bright stars, and over all there broods the silence and the



mystery of the wide-open spaces of the earth. No longer does the scene dazzle and sear, for the Nubian nights are soft and full of shadows. At times the desert winds are cool, or even cold, according to season, and occasionally one sees, far away on the rim of the sand, the fire of a Bedouin encampment.

On the following afternoon I was again by the sacred waters of the Nile, on the tree-bordered embankment at Khartoum, with the sun sinking behind the tall palms in a blaze of gold and crimson glory over the great native city of Omdurman and the hills of Kerreri. For the next week I was busily engaged in the preparations for my first journey south.

To the uninitiated it may seem that the time necessary for the few final arrangements ought to be only a matter of hours. This, however, is seldom if ever possible, and undue impatience is not only useless, but often imperils the success of the whole enterprise. Items which seem of trifling importance, when there are shops within a mile or two, assume altogether different proportions when once civilization has been left behind. This is a psychological phenomenon which it seems difficult for those who have never left the beaten tracks of travel fully to appreciate. An intended halt of a few days may become a week or two if one is not very business-like and insistent.

What struck me most about Khartoum—which derives its name from the Arabic words meaning “Elephant’s Trunk,” so called on account of the shape of the peninsula between the Blue and White

Niles—was the tranquil beauty of the early tropical mornings and the wonderful afterglow of the sunsets behind the tall palms which fringe the Blue Nile shore. Another even more welcome discovery was the almost complete absence of mosquitoes, although the flies were at times annoying. Khartoum stands on the west bank of the Blue Nile, just above the junction of this river with the White Nile. The principal residential quarter and promenade is the Embankment, which faces the former stream, and is shaded by a double row of big trees. In the centre of this avenue is the palace of the Governor-General, half covered by tropical foliage. The new and imposing structure was built on the same foundations as the old palace in which Gordon lived and died. Only the ground floor remained after the sack of Old Khartoum by the fanatical hordes of the Mahdi. On entering the new building from the river front a brass plate will be seen high up on the wall, marking the spot, on the old palace stairs, where Gordon was killed on January 26th, 1885. Since those terrible days the gardens behind the palace have been considerably enlarged, but many of the trees and plants of that time still remain—in particular, the rose tree planted by Gordon himself.

To the west of the palace is the War Office, an imposing block of buildings surrounded by green lawns, in the midst of which has been placed a fine equestrian statue of the late Lord Kitchener. Among other buildings worthy of note must be mentioned





NATIVE WOMEN OF THE BAHR-EL-GHAZAL.  
Note the protruding lips, which are a sign of beauty.

the Gordon College, where there is a museum of antiquities and also physiological and biological collections. Its most important function, however, is to instil into the youth of the Sudan some tincture of humane letters and of the crafts which may enable them to assist the material prosperity of their country.

About midway down the Khedive's Avenue there is a remarkably fine statue erected to Gordon's memory. It shows this national hero mounted on a richly caparisoned camel. Near by is the Cathedral Church, which is built in the form of a Latin cross. The stone used in the construction of this building is a yellow and red sandstone, brought from Jebel Aulia, near Khartoum. The floor of the sanctuary is, however, of Sudanese marble. Away behind the European town, which was laid out by Lord Kitchener in the form of the Union Jack, are the native villages. There are nineteen *deims*, or cantonments, each inhabited by a different tribe or calling. In many instances differences of race are reflected by peculiarities in the style of building. Particularly noticeable are the curious balloon-shaped huts of the Nigeria tribesmen, who often stop for a few weeks in Khartoum during their pilgrimages to Mecca.

On the shady riverside embankment, where stands the Grand Hotel, the last of its kind in this part of Africa, there is often a cool northerly breeze during the winter months which tempers the heat of the tropical sun, but nevertheless solar *topees* and drill suits are an essential part of one's kit. This breeze



becomes so strong at times that it whisks up the sand on the surrounding desert and deposits it, like fine rain, in the streets and on the houses and palms of Khartoum. During the months of March and April the Northern Sudan is subject to terrible sandstorms, called *haboobs*. A black cloud sweeps over the town from the plains around. The wind howls through the palms, and within a few minutes the sunlight, the sky and the entire surroundings are blotted out by the driving, stinging, choking sand. During one of these terrible storms it is semi-dark, and the fine grit makes its way through windows, doors and clothing. It literally penetrates everywhere, and an *haboob* may last for many hours. There is, however, a saying among the nomadic desert Arabs that a sandstorm which comes in the morning will pass away before sunset.

The Northern Sudan, in common with several other tropical countries, enjoys, climatically, the most perfect mornings and evenings. In Khartoum it is the custom to ride for an hour or two after sunrise, and to play tennis, golf or polo at sunset. The social life of this European city, built with consummate audacity in the very heart of a still savage land, centres around the Palace, the Grand Hotel, the Sudan Club and the polo ground on the outskirts of Omdurman. The soil of Khartoum is not altogether suitable for this game, but the open desert beyond the adjoining native city is certainly ideal. The Governor-General frequently lends his yacht, a rebuilt relic of Gordon's

old fleet, for the conveyance of players and visitors to a point on the opposite shore.

Across the main stream of the Nile, at the place where the Blue waters meet those of the more muddy White Nile, lies Omdurman, the great African metropolis, with an estimated population of about 100,000. It is a town built almost entirely of mud, which stretches for seven miles along the shore of the great river—"A seemingly endless vista of sun-scorched dwellings, immense, tortuous, inconsequent as the mind of the native Empire-builder who conceived it, with vague extremities merging almost imperceptibly into the surrounding desert."

Although a guide-book account of Omdurman is outside the province of this volume, it may be of interest to say something here about this great mud city of the Northern Sudan, which is known, by name at least, to almost every native man, woman and child in Africa. Up to about twenty-five or thirty years ago nearly all the slave trails of North-east Africa led to and from this great market. Notwithstanding this fact, well-known and spoken of with terror among the black tribes further south, it is the mecca of the younger generation all over this vast continent. Its wealth, the ornaments sold in its *sûks*, its gaiety in the native sense, the beauty of its girls, and its size and importance, are all magnified in the tales told by native story-tellers in every village throughout the Dark Continent. On more than one occasion, when hundreds of miles from civilization,



among savage peoples, I secured an immediate audience and subsequent friendship by showing some photographs which I had taken in this metropolis of native Africa.

Landing on the Omdurman side of the broad Nile, the most noticeable feature is the forest of tapering masts which dot the shore as far as the eye can see. This fleet of native craft is loading or unloading cargoes of dhurra and other grains, gums, timber and products gathered along the 6000 miles of the Nile system. It is interesting to note here that from Damietta to Victoria Nyanza, by way of the White Nile, is a distance of 3526 miles. In order to gain some idea of the extensive river system of this portion of Africa it is, however, necessary to add to this figure not only the length of such tributaries as the Atbara, the Bahr-el-Ghazal, the Sobat and the Pibor, but also the Blue Nile and its affluents.

The river-bank at Omdurman slopes gently down from the busy grain market to the water's edge. A curious spectacle is afforded by the contrasted colours of the two rivers, the murky white stream running side by side with the clear blue of its greatest tributary past the long lines of squat mud buildings lining the banks. On gaining the shore, through a motley throng of sheiks and others, some in flowing white robes, turbaned, fat and smiling, others in green and austere of countenance, among a multitude in dirty rags, there is a noticeable difference in both types and faces. A score of different races have their own quarters in

this great city. A few minutes' ride and one is among the curious collection of straw shanties forming the grain and gum market; then, after passing through the south gate—for Omdurman is a walled city—the Mosque Square is reached.

The outward aspect of this town, with its miles of square, flat-roofed, mud-walled houses, its jostling crowds, its donkeys and its lines of laden, vicious camels, has changed but little since the Khalifa established it as his capital, and spread terror far and wide over North Africa. In the vast walled square of the Mosque is the Khalifa's palace, built with bricks obtained from Gordon's residence in Khartoum. It was outside this low building, which stands as it was on the day when the Prophet and his bodyguard fled before Kitchener's avenging army, that the head of General Gordon was displayed in fanatical triumph to the people of this great city.

I was surprised to see in the courtyard of the Khalifa's palace, to which I was admitted by one of his old retainers still dressed in the motley of the Dervish army, Gordon's coach, very dilapidated and uncared-for in appearance, and but ill-protected from the blistering sun. Surely a relic like this of the last days of one of England's greatest Empire-builders should be preserved with more care. Here also is the Khalifa's coach, obtained through the Emperor of Abyssinia, which was carried by slaves across the desert to Omdurman. By the side of this palace, wherein can be seen the sword of this Dervish king



and a collection of arms from the battlefield of Kerreri, is the house occupied by Lord Kitchener after the famous battle which broke the Dervish power and gave to Britain and Egypt this vast addition to their territory in North Africa.

In the wide Mosque Square, the scene of much cruelty and bloodshed less than forty years ago, there is also the partially dismantled tomb of the Mahdi. It was here that a greater part of the population of Omdurman were daily gathered for prayer during the Mahdia, and it was from a low, mud-walled hut, not far from the Khalifa's house, that Colonel Slatin, when a prisoner, saved his life by appearing each day at sunset and turning devoutly towards Mecca in silent prayer. This gave the impression that he was a true follower of the Prophet, even in times of grave peril. Rudolf Von Slatin Pasha, one of the most interesting figures in the drama of the old Sudan, is now living in retirement in Austria.

A broad road, flanked by the seemingly interminable greyish brown walls, leads to the *súk*, or market, consisting of mile after mile of streets and shanties in which each trade retains its own locality and whose merchants are in many cases of the same race. Apart from the curious products of the whole interior of Africa, which can be purchased in the bazaars of Omdurman, the most noticeable feature is the entire absence of those indescribable odours which render every minute uncomfortable, and often unhealthy, in the markets of most native cities. There is here, also,

an absence of shouting and extravagance of gesture. There are no importunate sellers of wares, and one can watch in peace the ivory carvers, with primitive wooden wheels worked by the feet, fashioning bracelets, necklaces and other ornaments from the tusks of elephants killed in the great jungles of the south; the silversmiths at work on the curious pieces of filigree; the leather merchants sewing by hand bright red slippers with pointed toes; and the armourers making curious and often elaborate swords, spears and daggers, for the nomads of the desert are seldom seen without arms in their hands.

In the smaller native towns further south, at Wad Medani, El Dueim, Kosti and Sennar, rising above the low matting-covered booths in the *sûks*, there is generally a forest of moving, glittering spears, carried by the nomadic tribesmen of the surrounding country who have come in to do their shopping. Here and there one sees the scarlet leather scabbard of a sword, and on many a brown, muscular arm is a short-bladed dagger, encased in lizard skin and held above the elbow of the left arm by a band, where it is ready for quick use; but of these things more will be said in due course, for they belong to the wide, wild and sandy plains of Kordofan, the land of the evil eye, where, in one exciting moment, I learned the quick temper of these armed and highly superstitious warriors of the plains.

Outside the walls of Omdurman, which, when the sun sinks in fiery tropical glory over the wastes of



sand, stretching away north, south, east and west for hundreds of miles, is turned from a collection of dull, greyish brown buildings into a city of blood and fire, lies the historic battlefield of Kerreri (Omdurman). The lonely monument erected to the memory of the 21st Lancers is passed on the ride out to Jebel Surgham. From this point of vantage a wonderful bird's-eye view of the theatre of battle is obtained. It was near to this hill that Osman Digna's army lay hiding in a *khôr* when charged by the gallant 21st.

My guide in Omdurman—and nowhere is such a mixed blessing more necessary than in the labyrinth of passages and streets of a large native city—was an old slave of the Mahdi, who as a boy had been sold in the market of Abu Hamid for the sum of £10. With the approach of Kitchener's army he had, however, escaped, joined a native regiment and returned as one of the victorious troops to the scene of his slavery. Since these auspicious occasions, however, his views of life generally had become more commercialized, and *his* idea of a suitable recompense for my short lease of his services bore no comparison to the earlier freehold price of the same.

While in Omdurman, gaining a close insight into native life and customs in the *deims* of some twenty tribes, I met the son of the old Mahdi, the white man's most implacable enemy in Africa, but whose reign was by no means as cruel as that of the Khalifa, his appointed successor. Sir Said A. Elmahady, K.C.V.O., to give the son his full name and title, is

a man of middle age and fine physique, who is still referred to as "the Mahdi of the Sudan," and is the recognized spiritual leader of a number of tribes scattered over a wide area of country. His principal interest appears, however, to centre in Omdurman and in a thickly populated spot, 170 to 181 miles up the White Nile, called Aba Island. It was here that the father of the present Mahdi followed the trade of boat-building before taking up his religious crusade. Here also occurred his first engagement with Government troops. Aba Island is about 28 miles in length and is well wooded and thickly covered with native *tukls*. At a place called Fashishoya can still be seen the ruins of the Mahdi's house. His son has built a new residence on the island, besides having at least two large houses in the heart of Omdurman.

Unlike his father, the new Mahdi does not spurn Western ways, although he still dresses in flowing silks. On the day appointed for my visit I was met by his secretary and driven through the city to his official residence in one of the few motor-cars in Omdurman. The Mahdi received me in a typically Arab apartment, and while discussing affairs in the Sudan I was handsomely regaled with tea *à l'Anglaise*. There is all the fire of the old fanatic in the restless eyes of his son, and the same elocutionary powers; but there appears to be a broader-minded tolerance, a desire to cooperate rather than to oppose, and, above all, a dignity compatible with his office of spiritual leader of a haughty and sensitive people.



As the interview was a private one, and the conversation often of a direct and personal character, it would be unfair to attempt its reproduction here ; but I could not help thinking, while sitting on the divan in that palace of Omdurman, that some few years ago I should not have received the same hospitality in the same place. There was, however, one point in our conversation which may be of interest to some readers. It was the opinion of the Mahdi—given in answer to my question as to what an ancient people like his followers thought of Western innovations such as the Sennar Dam, the railway and the Gezira irrigation scheme—that so long as these works did not affect the established customs and observances of the people of the Sudan he considered they would see that the advantages outweighed any small objections to progress which they might have inherited. Sir Said Elmahady had just received his title from the King, and I was shown a golden sword made in the *sûk* of this native city which was the replica of one sent for His Majesty's acceptance.

## CHAPTER III

### Towards Abyssinia

**T**WO weeks in Khartoum were fully occupied in putting the finishing touches to both kit and equipment and collecting all the information available as to the best routes, possible difficulties, the temper and character of the better known native tribes, climatic peculiarities and the hundred-and-one vital factors which have to be carefully reviewed before decisions can be made which make or mar the success of any enterprise off the beaten track.

The traveller who neglects to gain by careful study a proper appreciation of the trials and difficulties experienced by others in different parts of the country to which he is going will accomplish but little in the way of exploration or scientific investigation in any savage land. My own plan is to make a *précis* of all useful information, together with an annotated chart, but others whom I have met, either inside or outside the pale of civilization, appear to content themselves with a number of simple notes. When this essential work was completed there followed an unavoidable delay of several weeks before the somewhat complicated means of transport, on both land and river,



could be properly synchronized. While this was in progress I made a reconnaissance along the Blue Nile towards South-western Abyssinia, passing through Old Sennar, with its monkey forest, into the more open big game country around Singa and the Dinder River.

A preliminary journey of this character was, however, not altogether a waste of time. It enabled me to gain an insight into life and conditions along the frontier of civilization in that area of the Southern Sudan, some 200 miles south-east of Khartoum, which forms a portion of the vexed border, and also to test under actual working conditions my cameras and outfit. Here I would say for the guidance of other travellers that, although the actinic value of the light in the Northern Sudan is exceptionally good, the atmosphere seems to thicken somewhat when the sandy wastes are exchanged for the tropical jungles of the south. Unless the camera has very rapid lenses, a fiftieth to a twenty-fifth of a second with an aperture at F. 8 is not likely to give an over-exposure during midday. At certain places great care has to be taken when attempting to photograph natives, especially children. The fear of the evil-eye is so great that charms are carried to protect the wearer from its baneful influence. Even money, which it is not advisable for travellers to offer, is often powerless to overcome this superstition among the few tribes who understand its use. Neglect of proper precautions landed me in a very tight corner quite early in my travels, but that is another story.

It may be of interest to give here a few particulars regarding arms, equipment and means of transport, because these items greatly affect all pioneer work, and since the appearance of my previous book, *Among Wild Tribes of the Amazons*, I have received many enquiries about these matters, not only from England and the United States, but also from other countries in which translations of the work appeared. To the latter class of reader satisfactory replies were often difficult to give, owing to a lack of knowledge on my part regarding foreign-made equipment.

First there is the important question of arms and ammunition. No difficulty need be experienced by travellers in importing into the Sudan any fire-arms except .303 rifles and .450 Army pattern revolvers, which are absolutely prohibited—this regulation deprived me of a weapon which I have hitherto always carried when away from civilization. Automatic pistols, other than those mentioned, can sometimes be imported into the Sudan by special licence when required for personal protection. When passing through both Egypt and the Sudan on the way into the interior two separate permits are necessary. One can be obtained from the Department of Ordnance Services, Egyptian Army, and the other from the Sudan Agent in either London or Cairo. With regard to Uganda I cannot do better than give here an extract from the regulations upon this point: "Travellers may introduce arms and ammunition into the Protectorate if they can satisfy the Provincial Commissioner that such



arms and ammunition are required for their legitimate use." This enables any accredited explorer or hunter entering Uganda from the Sudan to do so without any inconvenience or previous application.

The most suitable battery depends very largely upon whether exploration or big game is the primary object of the expedition. Not being able to place myself in the ranks of redoubtable hunters I prefer to quote an authority on this point: "One D.B. .450 Cordite Express for heavy and dangerous game, a small-bore magazine rifle, such as the .275 Mauser or .256 Mannlicher, and a shot gun will probably meet all requirements." Personally, however, I prefer to rely on a single Winchester, believing that the weapon which one is most accustomed to using and with which constant practice is obtained is the most reliable in sudden emergencies.

Among the more essential items of equipment should be mentioned: mosquito nets and boots, double-fly green Willesden tent, waterproof ground sheet, field-glasses, cameras, solar *topee* or double Terai hat, tinted glasses, medicine chest, canvas water-bottles with filters (for use after the water has been boiled) and bed with bedding in a canvas bag. One authority very wisely recommends: "That stores should include plenty of tinned vegetables and fruits, as of these there is a dearth in most parts of the country. The traveller should see that he starts with sufficient supplies for the whole trip. He will not find aerated waters or ice factories, wine merchants' shops

or market gardens in the interior, and he should be supplied accordingly before starting."

Apart from the Government post-boats on some of the principal rivers, native *nuggars*, or open sailing-boats, with a grass roof for protection against the sun and manned by four men, can sometimes be hired in Khartoum or Omdurman at a rental varying from £4 to £8 a week, including the pay of the crew. If a sailing boat is employed, it is not advisable to proceed further south, on the White Nile, than Lake No, as a craft of this description is not suitable for going up the Bahr-el-Zeraf, the Bahr-el-Ghazal, or for passing through the Sudd region on the main stream between Lake No and Shambé. Small shallow-draught steamers can sometimes be obtained from the Government at Khartoum. These make excellent bases for expeditions away from the rivers.

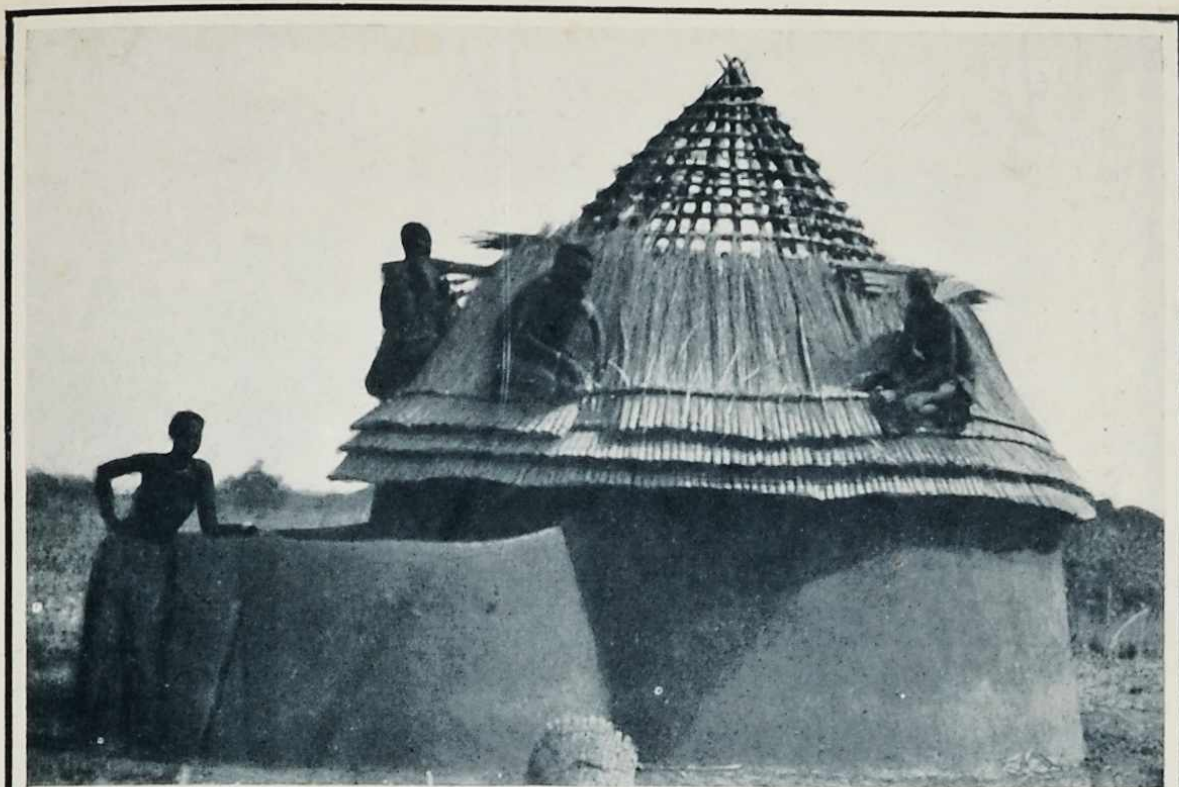
Except for the tropical forests and swamps south of the 11th parallel of Latitude, camels will be found the most satisfactory mode of land transport. These can be hired, together with the men in charge of them, for about 10 or 12 piastres (2s. to 2s. 6d.) a day. Mules and donkeys are also useful in certain parts of the country. The weight carried comfortably by a camel is 300 to 400 pounds, by a mule 150 to 200 pounds, and by a good donkey 100 to 150 pounds. The speed of baggage camels is about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  to  $2\frac{3}{4}$  miles an hour, and those bred near the rivers will not do more than about four days' work without water. This last item is carried either in *girbas* (skins) or in *fantasses*



(iron tanks) of about 10 gallons capacity. Although the *girbas* are light and keep the water cool by evaporation, they are very likely to get punctured in thorny country, and, moreover, when new impart a most foul taste to what is often the only available drinking supply. During months of travelling over this portion of Africa I had occasion to use all these forms of transport and equipment. The trials and troubles occasioned by each, as the weeks and the distance away from civilization increased, will therefore be described as they occurred in the narrative of events.

While proceeding south from Khartoum to Sennar, a journey of about 168 miles which can now be accomplished by railway, I was afforded an opportunity of staying for a few days at Barakat, in the heart of the Gezira cotton fields. Perhaps the most noticeable feature was the remarkably healthy appearance of the plants and the inconceivably vast area already under this most valuable crop. Without pretending to any expert knowledge of cotton growing, I have seen fields in the southern states of America, in Lower Egypt and on the coast of Peru, but nowhere did they strike me as being so uniformly healthy-looking and well cared for. This latter condition is the more surprising because it is only quite recently that many of the thousands of natives employed—or rather engaged—have been taught by the white inspectors and their assistants to cultivate and pick this wonderful commodity. The whole plantation of about 90,000 acres, divided by roads and paths for transport purposes,





SHILLUK THATCHERS AT WORK. Among this tribe thatching is a hereditary trade,

NUBAS WITH THEIR EMERGENCY RATIONS. A party of hunters from the Moro Range with butter and flour formed into rolls round whisks of hair. Having no pockets, this is how essential food is carried during a hunting trip or raid.



appears to be one vast sea of green bushes with large and small rivulets of water running criss-cross between the fields. It was on this journey that I met Mr. W. Pilley, a Government Commissioner in the Nuba Mountains, and to whom I was afterwards indebted for some excellent photographs of the curious inhabitants of this isolated region.

Shortly after dawn, on the day following my arrival at Barakat, I motored out into this ocean of green and breakfasted, at the early hour of 7 a.m., with an Inspector and his wife, who were enthusiastic as to the possibilities and, what is of equal importance, they seemed to be both healthy and comfortable in their well-built, mosquito-protected bungalow. They had managed to rear a cow, which supplied both milk and cream, and to cultivate quite a nice vegetable garden. Later on I lunched in another district, and saw camels laden with gigantic bags of cotton making for the railway. During the day I also visited the *tukl* of a native cultivator from West Africa and admired his fat, naked but healthy family, and finally dined at headquarters in Barakat without leaving for a single mile, during the whole day's motoring, either the cotton fields or the fine system of roads and canals. In fact, the whole ring of the horizon was a curious motley of green cotton plants and the most wonderful mirage effects. The Gezira cotton fields, like the railways across the desert, are achievements of which the Sudan has every reason to feel proud.

From Barakat I journeyed south to Makwar. Here



stands the great dam which has made possible the irrigation of the Gezira. It is a stupendous engineering feat which is based on the lucky find, by a Government mineralogist, of a strata of hard rock across the Blue Nile. Perhaps the most impressive sight at Makwar is not the dam itself, but the sea of blue water which it impounds. To gaze over this vast lake, with its shores in the shimmering haze of distance, and to realize that all this—in the heart of Africa—is the result of British engineering skill, combined with the ability and dogged perseverance of one comparatively young contractor's "Agent-in-charge" (Mr. Gibson), is an education in Empire development and one more indication, if such is needed, that the great mission of the Anglo-Saxon race all over the world is the conquering of the wide, open spaces and the subduing of wild Nature.

After Makwar came a delve into the "blue" of the Dinder River region. While passing through the Sennar Forest an amusing incident occurred. This jungle, from the tree-tops of which lianas hang down in great number, is the sunny habitat of large troops of diminutive grey monkeys, who have the Blue Nile to supply them with water. I had left the track which leads through this forest towards Singa, and was searching on foot with a native for the river-edge, when a large brown body flashed across a dim glade in a peculiarly thick part of the jungle. It appeared to be chasing a troop of small monkeys, who quickly placed themselves out of danger by climbing up one of the rope-like creepers hanging down from the leafy roof.



The Hamag Arab who was with me made a peculiar hissing noise and crouched down in the undergrowth. I was unarmed, except for a small revolver, and had no intention of stalking big game, but as my camera was handy and the opportunity seemed to offer I moved cautiously forward with the Kodak battery at the ready. Cracking twigs lured us on, then suddenly we saw the brown body behind a tree. The position was a little difficult. Was this creature a big monkey, a baboon, or some more dangerous animal? To stalk it unarmed seemed the height of folly, and I was about to give up the chase when my Arab follower rose up from the undergrowth in which we had been taking cover and laughingly called out in Arabic.

The brown body we had been stalking for over a mile, through snake-infested jungle along the water's edge, in a temperature of about 104 F., came out very shyly from behind the tree. It was a stark naked little boy with very frightened black eyes. He had come from the family grass hut in the depths of the forest, and when we first saw him was playfully chasing a troop of monkeys. Getting frightened at being tracked, he had employed all the woodcraft inherent in the native of even tender years, but the river, for which we had been searching, cut off further retreat. This little fellow was unfortunately so frightened that he could not be induced either to approach or to accept some coins.

That night we spent on the east bank of the Blue Nile, and on the following day reached more open



country. Skirting round Singa, which is about 40 miles from Old Sennar, we struck south-east towards a point on the Dinder some miles south of Abu Hashim. From this place southwards and eastwards big game is plentiful. Sir Samuel Baker's old hunting grounds are, however, much further to the north, above Gedaref, on the frontier of Abyssinia. We saw a herd of elephants, but the ivory was small, and quite a number of waterbuck and *tiang*. The Fung blacks, who are now an uninteresting people notwithstanding their wonderful history, told me that both lion and leopard are numerous, but beyond the spoor of the former, near a large but half-dry pool in the river-bed, we saw only the game mentioned, together with a few bustard and guinea fowl.

I had intended to work my way back to rail-head at Sennar, then to go from there to Kosti on the White Nile and board the Government steamer which was to take me some 300 miles further south. In this way I should have been saved the long journey back to Khartoum and then south by water. A glance at the map will show the relative position of these different places. An unusually low river season made this plan impossible. In order to get past the shallows before the water dropped further the steamer would have to leave at once for the far south, and, in consequence, the cross-country journeys could not be made in time to coincide with the arrival of the boat at Kosti. Acting in response to an official telegram—sent by runner from rail-head—I was forced to alter



my plans in a few minutes and return post-haste to Khartoum. It is interesting to observe here that never, in any part of the world, has it been possible for me to fix definitely from the start an exact and unalterable line of advance. From my conversations at various times and places with other travellers it would seem to be essential for the plans of all expeditions off the beaten track to be sufficiently elastic for quick rearrangement without chaos or loss of the true objective.

As this book is not a record of big game hunting, nor a descriptive account of the better known parts of the Sudan, it is quite unnecessary to weary the reader with further details of the return to Khartoum. Here I received every possible assistance from the Government and its officials, as well as from the commercial community, and was soon aboard the little river steamer *Omdurman*. Late in the afternoon of January 26th we passed Gordon's old fortification and rounded the Mogren Point, at the meeting of the two greatest rivers of Africa. With the blood-red orb of the setting sun hanging low over the desert the old stern-wheeler, which had seen service in the days of the reconquest of the Sudan, headed into the White Nile and commenced her long journey towards the centre of the continent.

## CHAPTER IV

### Queer People of Kordofan

**I**T was early morning. All around were the limpid, lake-like waters of the White Nile, with its shimmering surface broken only by the tail-whisk of an early awakened crocodile and flocks of wild geese, pelican and water-fowl flying from roosting-place to feeding ground. A light haze, like a pale blue gossamer veil, hung over the desert sand, but as the sun rose from behind the far-away Abyssinian Mountains a line of vivid yellow marked the shallow, low-lying western shore.

The scene was the acme of tranquil beauty, which gave no hint of the wild realm through which we were gliding. It seemed impossible to believe that in a few short hours the cool, unruffled water would become a dazzling sheet of molten gold and the yellow banks a cruel waste of tawny, sun-scorched sand, with no sign of life on all of the leagues within vision. Contrary to general belief, the nomad of the desert seldom travels far before the purple shadows of early evening are creeping over the thorn-bush wastes of Northern Kordofan.

At the risk of wearying the reader with topographical details something must be said here to



supplement the accompanying sketch map, so that the general aspect of the country may be better understood. The vast area, of which the map conveys such a poor idea, lying between the 16th parallel of North Latitude (Khartoum,  $15^{\circ} 36'$  N.) and the 9th parallel, which marks the beginning of the Bahr-el-Ghazal region—the subject of a separate survey later on—is, approximately, 410 miles from north to south, and, with the White Nile for its eastern frontier and Darfur for its western border, is about 350 miles from east to west. The total area is somewhere about 130,000 square miles, and portions of it come within the territorial borders of Kordofan, the Dar Nuba (or Land of the Nubas) and the regions of the White and Upper Nile. An area of wild country, equally as large, extends from the east bank of the White Nile to the Abyssinian frontier, but about this region more will be said in future pages.

North of the 13th parallel lie the vast sandy plains, covered with low scrub and broken here and there by rocky hills, seldom more than 600 feet high. It is the southern fringe of the great Sahara Desert. South of Latitude  $13^{\circ}$  the real bush country commences, with *hashab* trees (grey acacia) and *sunt* trees (red acacia) to be frequently seen, especially close to the river. Inland from the White Nile, between Long  $29^{\circ}$  and  $32^{\circ}$  E., is the great, black soiled plain from which rise the wild mountains of Dar Nuba, consisting of isolated and steep masses of rugged granite, honey-combed with the cave-strongholds of these queer



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people. From the southern border of the Dar Nuba tropical forests and thick undergrowth spread southwards to the great Sudd, or swamp region of the Upper Nile, and round it, westwards, into the still only partially explored centre of the continent.

It was the northern, or thorn-bush desert, that we were now crossing, and as the early morning haze melted into the mirage of lakes and trees, which formed the only horizon for many hours each day, great brown patches moving over the plains in haloes of dust, or motionless on the banks by the waters' edge, denoted the herds of cattle, sheep and goats being watered by their owners, the turbulent Hassani tribe. These nomads are very numerous along this portion of the White Nile, and own large numbers of cattle and horses. Being of Arab descent, although somewhat darkened in complexion by the blood of negroid races of the south and east, they are excellent horsemen, and like most wandering tribes are seldom seen without the broad-bladed *kibis*, or long spear.

The Hassani consider themselves to be of Kawahla origin and are believed to practise blood-brotherhood. This strange cult, of which so little is really known, is undoubtedly a form of secret society, whereby two members are bound to each other and to the rest of the tribe by a considerable transfusion of blood. It is interesting to note here that this ancient practice, which really aims at the prevention of treachery, reaches its maximum point in Arabia, and that it was from the east that this tribe is believed to have



migrated into Kordofan. The Kawahla broke away from the great and powerful Kababish group of camel-owning nomads of the northern desert on the outbreak of the Mahdi Revolt, and, by so doing, started a feud which is still carried on in the form of fierce quarrels and occasional bloodshed over grazing and watering rights.

So far as could be learned from a visit to one of their encampments near El Geteina they are Sunni Mohammedans of the Malaki sect, and, as such, are undoubtedly prone to sudden acts of religious fanaticism. Although a few of these people cultivate small patches of ground, where there is water from the river or wells in the vicinity, they are mostly wanderers and come down to the Nile with their herds during the dry season. The head sheik carries with him the *nabas*, or war-drums, which act as a symbol of office and are sounded to rally the tribe. Further south, among the black races of Equatoria, I saw tom-toms of many kinds, those of the Nuers being decorated with skulls, and having human bones inside so that they can be used as rattles, but I was never able to discover the reason why these drums, all over the African wilds, are considered such important symbols of office. Their loss often means the downfall of a chief.

The large native village of Geteina, which stands on the right bank of the river about 60 miles south of Khartoum, is inhabited by what are known as sedentary Arabs—those nomads who have abandoned a



wandering life and settled down as cultivators. They are mostly Jaalin and Danagla. This latter tribe, up to quite recent years, was renowned for its slave-raiding propensities. After leaving this uninteresting place many villages, mostly composed of square mud huts, are seen on the high, sandy, eastern bank, and, on the opposite side of the river, here fairly broad, crops of *safra dura* are being raised in the narrow strip of dark mud left by the falling Nile. *Safra dura* is a kind of coarse-grained millet, and is a staple article of food among the people of the Northern Sudan. Some miles further on a group of hills appeared far away to the south-west. These I was able to identify from a map supplied to me by the Sudan Intelligence Department as Jebel Arashkol. Here the type of country begins to change, the soil becomes less sandy near the river and dense growths of acacia and mimosa make their first appearance. It was from Tura El Khadra, a dilapidated collection of mud huts on the left bank, about 100 miles from Khartoum, that Slatin Pasha set out by camel on his last journey to Darfur in 1882.

At El Dueim, an important Arab town some 30 miles further upstream, I first learned of the fear of the evil eye which exists among the tribes of Kordofan. The charms worn round the arms and necks of even children to ward off evil had, of course, attracted my notice many miles back in the Nubian Desert, but I had not then realized the influence which this superstition exercises over the lives of these people. Having



left the river-bank and wandered through the native town into the desert beyond, I was watching a caravan of laden camels being prepared for its long and almost waterless march into the interior, when I noticed a number of children playing in the sand. Thinking that a good picture could be secured I got out my camera and levelled it at the little group. Almost instantly there were howls of rage from the wild-looking men engaged in loading the camels. At the moment I did not realize the danger and continued to approach the children with the object of getting them all into the photograph. One, a girl, who was evidently the eldest and wore a crescent-shaped gold nose-ring, as well as two immense silver anklets, picked up one frightened little infant and started to run away with it.

In a moment I found myself facing several nasty looking spears with dark, hawk-like faces glaring at me. Several of the older men gesticulated and shouted. I am convinced that only my expression of genuine surprise saved me from violence. My Arabic vocabulary consisted of a few words laboriously committed to memory during the long journey through Egypt and the northern desert of the Sudan. These I employed to some purpose, for the shining blades were slowly raised, but not even the sight of silver piastres would tempt these desert people to overcome their superstitious belief in the evil eye of the camera so far as to pose for their photographs, or even allow me to take a snapshot of the camel-train.



Later on, among the Shilluks and Dinkas, I often experienced the same difficulty, but soon learned to look in a different direction to that in which I was photographing. The further one gets from civilization the more difficult does it become to secure good pictures of native life. If superstition or distrust does not render it as much as life is worth, then ignorance steps in and galvanizes every figure into a bronze or black statue. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule, and among almost every tribe a sufficiently strong inducement, either in money or trade goods, will cause one or more members to overcome whatever scruples they may possess. Only time and patience can, however, induce them to face the camera with other feelings or expressions than those of rigid restraint or horrified expectation. Moreover, while time is being lavishly expended out of what is usually a very limited stock, the local chief, or medicine-man, is generally busy stirring up trouble which may literally break on the explorer's head at any moment of the day or night.

A two days' camel journey from the Arab town of Dueim into the waterless El Akaba Desert, which is covered with *marika* (*Leptademia Spartium*) bush and coarse grass, enables quite good shooting to be had. The best neighbourhood appears to be near Jeb-el-Shuweih, where both Ril and Dorcas gazelle can usually be obtained. From the scenic point of view, however, this hot and dusty ride into the Kordofan wilds is scarcely worth the effort involved, although



it was in this sandy, desolate region that I saw the *Eryx muelleri*, or burrowing snake. They are non-poisonous and have cylindrical bodies with short, stumpy tails. El Akaba is also the home of the deadly asp, or horned viper.

Shortly after leaving Dueim the open bush country was finally left behind, and forests of mimosa and acacia trees became numerous, especially along the river-banks. We were now passing through a region which has a rainfall of from 11 to 13 inches a year, generally during the period between June and September. Here, as in the Sudan generally, the three principal seasons are: the *Kharif*, or rainy period, which varies according to latitude; the *Seif*, or dry summer season, during March, April and May, when hot southerly winds raise clouds of sand on the northern deserts and, in the south, the sun sends the temperature soaring up to anything short of 113° F. in the shade; and the *Shita*, or winter, from November to February, when the maximum shade temperature seldom exceeds 100° F. Although these climatic peculiarities may be said to apply to Kordofan, the White Nile and the Dar Nuba, they do not accurately describe the climate of the Bahr-el-Ghazal, which will receive attention later.

A few miles south of Kawa—a village on the right bank inhabited by Lahawiin Arabs, who came originally from Arabia—the northern end of Aba Island came into view. This well-wooded piece of land, which is called an island because a small creek runs round its



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eastern side while the White Nile flows along its western shore, is interesting because it was here that Mohammed Ahmed El Mahdi, whose son I had met in Khartoum, originated his Holy War which drenched the Sudan in blood and, from 1882 to 1900, closed the whole of this vast country to European exploration. About midway down this island, which is 28 miles in length, stands Fashishoya, on the west bank of the river. Here can still be seen the Mahdi's house, now in ruins, where he spent his earlier years building crude boats. General Sir F. R. Wyngate, in 1899, made this the starting-point of his expedition, which ended in the defeat and death of the Khalifa Abdullahi at a spot about 50 miles distant, called Um Debreikat, in the Dar, or country of the nomadic Hamadi, who lost heavily in both men and cattle owing to their fidelity to this cruel despot.

About this time it seemed that I should never reach those still far distant and semi-explored regions which were to be the scene of my first investigations. I had already travelled 1700 miles from the coast of Egypt, and when each day I marked off the progress made on a sketch map which I had prepared in Khartoum, the advance across its spaces seemed so slow that I began to despair. We were, however, fighting the current, and instead of getting easier it would probably become stronger with every hundred miles we progressed south. After passing Kosti, and the last link with civilization—the lonely, desert railway to El Obeid—the nature of the country changed rapidly. Dense



forests came down almost to the water's edge, here fringed with tall papyrus, the true precursor of the equatorial swamps. No longer was the eye seared by the blinding desert glare, and with the change of scenery came also a change in the people inhabiting the banks. There was still, however, the country of the turbulent Baggara horsemen to traverse—a belt some 150 miles long—before I could leave the steamer to begin my work in the little-known kingdom of the giant Shilluks.

About four miles south of Kosti, among a group of native villages, is that of Khor Agwal, where the Emir Abdel Hamid, claimant to the throne of Darfur, resides with a considerable number of armed followers. When the curiously imposing granite ridge of Jebelain had been passed, the Upper Nile, now very much reduced in size to what it was near Khartoum, nearly 300 miles distant, settled down into a typical river of Equatorial Africa. The banks became low and swampy and the channel twisted through forests and round reedy islands. Masses of floating weed were everywhere on the surface, and landing on either side became daily more difficult owing to the belt of tall papyrus. The more open forest country on the west bank, and as far inland as Darfur, is the land of the nomadic Baggara tribes, who formed the cavalry of the old Dervish army, and were among the most ruthless slave hunters in Africa. Even now they occasionally seek an opportunity of enslaving Nuba boys and girls, as a story which I have to tell later on will clearly prove.



## 64 Queer People of Kordofan

The Baggara own large herds of cattle, sheep, goats and horses, and are keen hunters of big game, which they often ride down and kill with their long *kibis*. Unlike the camel-owning Arabs of the northern deserts they seldom carry swords, but in war-time are never seen without a round-pointed lance for piercing chain armour, and a smaller weapon with a hideous barbed point. Short spears are carried in a *turkash*, or quiver, slung on the left side of the saddle, while the long, broad-bladed weapon, or fine-pointed lance is held ready in the hand and swung over the head for stabbing. On visiting some of their encampments, about 10 miles from Renk, I was surprised to find that many of these old warriors wear chain mail-shirts, the more modern being made of split-rings, while those of antique manufacture had riveted links. When roving with their herds or while out hunting they erect tents of palm-matting, but in their villages the huts are constructed of mud and stalks.

The Baggara whom I met on the Upper Nile were of the Selim and Aulad-Hemeid tribes, subsequently, in and around Dar Nuba, I came across other varieties of these wild horsemen who inhabit what may be termed the Arab-Negro frontier. In 1912 the *nazir*, or chief of the Aulad-Hemeid, was murdered by a *fiki*, or wandering holy man, who, more recently, attempted unsuccessfully to stir up these turbulent tribes to open revolt. Internecine warfare is common, especially in the west, between the Hawazma, Homr and Messeria tribes, who have expanded greatly since



the Mahdia. The Homr, who it is believed can muster over 2000 horsemen, are among the most savage of the Baggara peoples. They are great elephant and rhinoceros hunters, and were formerly slave raiders on a large scale.

Just before reaching the headquarters of the Shilluks, near Kodok, nearly 500 miles south of Khartoum, the forests closed in on the now weed-filled stream, except where grass swamps formed patches of vivid green against the sombre trees. Contrary to general belief, the forests of Equatorial Africa—here at their northernmost limit—contain but few palms, although there are numbers of trees of such large dimensions as the *abu Surug* (*Prosopis oblonga*), the *Jul* (*Sterculia tomentosa*), which yields a useful gum, and the rubber vine (*Landolphia florida*).

Almost every mud-bank hereabouts supports one or more greenish-grey, yellow-striped crocodile, basking in the tropical sun, yet with evil luminous eyes half-open and jaws ready to snap at any incautious man or beast who may come suddenly through the tall grass fringing the river-bank. Every mile of water has its school of ponderous hippopotami, who swim about with their huge heads and bulging eyes well above the surface, but ears alert for the first sound of danger. Occasionally one of these huge mammals will open wide his jaws and yawn into the hot, humid air. The red mouth and large flat-topped teeth can be clearly seen 200 yards away.

Early one morning I ventured into a treacherous

grass swamp bordering the river, in an unwise endeavour to secure a close-up photograph of hippopotami coming down from their reed-beds on the bank for their morning bathe in the river. Not only was I severely bitten by a form of tick, as well as by a swarm of disturbed mosquitoes, but I also experienced the uncomfortable sensation of being lost in the grass jungle. Although over five feet ten inches in height, so tall were the green, knife-like fronds that I could not see a yard in any direction. The absence of any rise in the ground, combined with continual slipping into deep holes among the ooze-like mud and broken stems, trampled down here and there by big game coming to the river for water, gave me not only more sport than I had expected, but also a most uncomfortable day spent dabbing myself all over with Scrubbs' ammonia. Luckily, being on the east bank, I was able to steer for the water's edge by the simple expedient of turning my back to the morning sun. On the following day, still feeling very sore, I landed among the Shilluks.



## CHAPTER V

### The Land of the Giant Shilluks

**A**LTHOUGH my first meeting with the savage Shilluks occurred in mid-stream, near the village of Kaka, where two of these immensely tall and thin, blue-black natives had somehow succeeded in upsetting the frail *ambach* canoe in which they had been paddling along the reedy river-bank, it was not until Kodok had been reached that I landed, with cameras, baggage and equipment, in the very centre of their country—one of the most curious and little-known native kingdoms in the world.

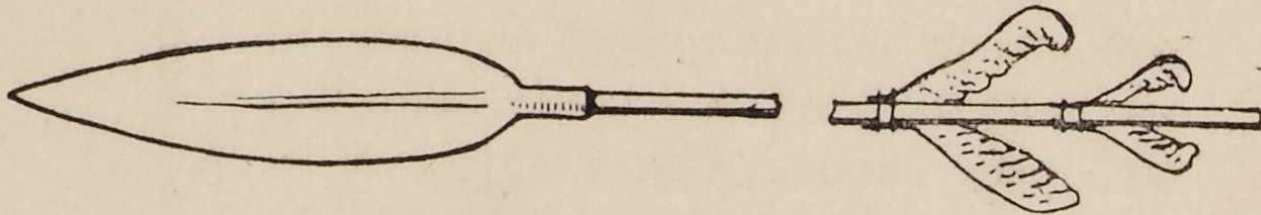
The Shilluks have from time immemorial been ruled by a *Ret*, or king, and a list, known to every educated tribesman, gives twenty-six of these potentates, although royal descent is only recognized up to four generations. The dominion of the *Ret*, or *Mek*, as he is officially termed, extends over an area of country along the west bank of the Upper Nile, between Kaka and Tonga, along the east bank from a little south of a point opposite Kodok to Tawfikia, and on both sides of the Sobat River for a distance of about 18 miles from its mouth (see map).

No exact area of the Shilluk kingdom can possibly be given here, because inland from the rivers the

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country is only semi-explored. There are, in these belts of Central African territory, which extend from about  $9^{\circ}$  to  $11^{\circ}$  North of the Equator, over 1300 villages, composed entirely of conical straw and mud *tukls*, containing, at a rough estimate, about 40,000 savages. Only the large riverside villages of Kaka, Kodok, Lul, Malakal, Tawfikia and Tonga are, however, marked on existing maps.

Unlike most native tribes, every man, woman and child among the Shilluks gives unquestioned allegiance to the Mek; and, through a system of espionage,



SHILLUK STABBING SPEAR

This weapon varies in length from 6 ft. to 8 ft., and has one or more ostrich feather tufts near the butt-end.

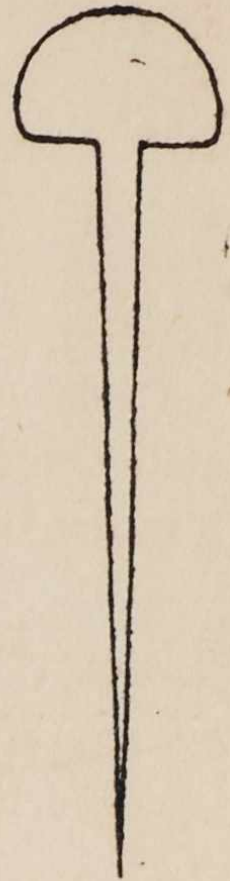
every act or happening, however trivial, throughout the whole country is immediately reported to the king, who resides at the little village of Fashoda, some six miles inland from Kodok. These natives may be considered as giants, for they vary from about six to seven feet in height, and are usually very slim, exceptionally long-limbed and muscular. They have glossy black skins of satin-like smoothness, and they clothe themselves with a single piece of rust-coloured cloth tied on the right shoulder. The women wear a similar covering, but the children are usually completely naked.



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The Shilluk warrior is never seen outside his *tukl* without a long spear, having a broad, leaf-shaped blade, and an ostrich feather tuft near the butt-end. These spears are always kept scrupulously clean. A common sight is a number of these huge and picturesque men squatting on the ground carefully polishing already bright metal. In addition to this long, stabbing weapon, two small throwing spears are usually carried, but the Shilluks have no bows or arrows, only the three forms of spear, and, when at war with their neighbours the Dinkas—as at the time of my arrival in their country—a special club, which is an ingenious affair, combining in one article, made of exceedingly hard wood, a spear, knob-kerry and seat.

They have two kinds of shield. One is a small semicircle of light *ambach* wood, used as an arm-guard when lion hunting and also when fighting from canoes or rafts. The other is a large shield of hippopotamus hide, about 5 feet high and 3 feet broad, which is carried into battle. In and around their own villages, however, they carry a long and heavy stick with a leather hand-guard, but often dispense with all other

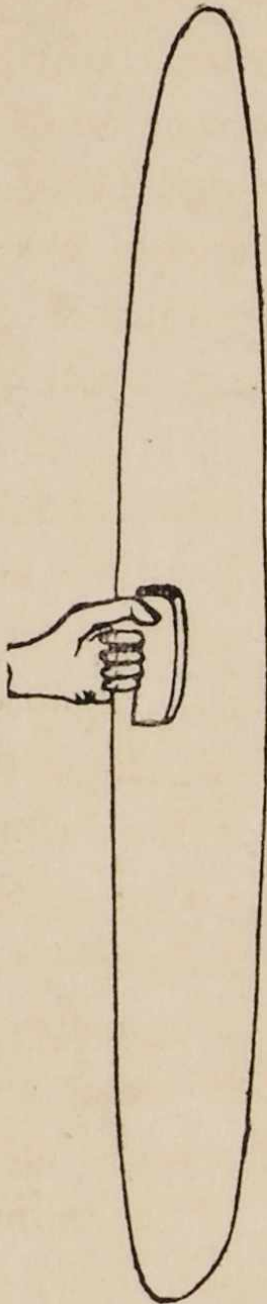


SHILLUK KNOB-KERRY AND SEAT

This ingenious little weapon is made of very hard wood and is about 3 ft. in total length. The point can be used for stabbing or for sticking in the ground.

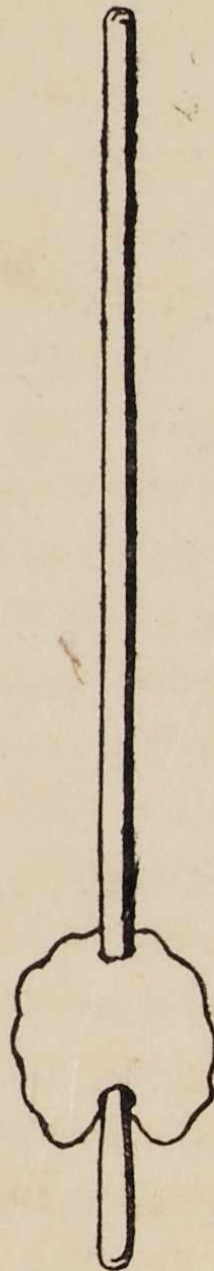
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weapons, except, of course, the big stabbing spear. It would seem probable that this quarter-staff dates



AMBACH SHIELD

This guard is about 3 ft. in length and 18 ins. in circumference. It is made of one of the lightest woods known.



QUARTER-STAFF

This weapon is about 5 ft. in length and is made of hard, heavy wood. The leather hand-guard is of hippopotamus hide.

from the comparatively recent past, before the use of iron for making spear-heads became known.



## The Land of the Giant Shilluks 71

What struck me most about these queer natives, when I landed on the west bank of the Upper Nile, 2200 miles from the mouth of this great river, and watched the little Government steamer which had brought me into the heart of a savage land steam slowly into the equatorial haze, was, undoubtedly, the elaborate method of hairdressing among the men, and the plain and almost bald appearance of the women. This reversal of a custom usual among uncivilized as well as civilized peoples caused me to begin my investigations at this point, and I was slowly initiated into one of the most curious and yet disgusting customs it has ever been my lot to witness.

The Shilluk men allow their hair to grow long and, by a special process, then work it into the most fantastic shapes. The fashionable mode for really smart men is either a cone-shaped erection projecting from the crown of the head, or else a tam-o'-shanter effect. The dandy Shilluk, however, who wants something distinctive, has his hair dyed red and formed into a series of tight wig-like curls, not unlike those worn by English barristers. The Shilluk girl, on the contrary, affects a puritanical but much cleaner form of head-dress. She has the front portion of the skull shaved and the remainder shingled very close to the head; while the poor little flapper, in this part of the world, comes very poorly off; she has absolutely nothing to flap about, either in the way of clothes or coiffure—in fact she is usually sold for a few cows or goats.



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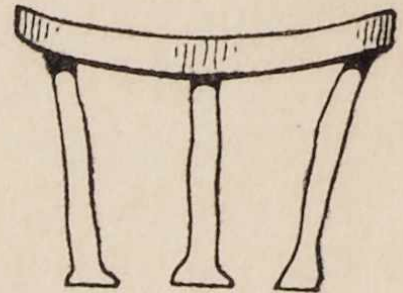
On my second day among these natives I visited the *tukl* of the local barber, a most influential and respected person in every Shilluk village, because his office is hereditary and his work second in importance only to those of cattle-breeding and fighting. Although accustomed to the more crude forms of life which exist among uncivilized and barbarous peoples, I confess to a succession of nauseating discoveries which left me at the end of the day (for each vermin-filled head occupied hours) so physically sick that at first I thought it was the forerunner of malarial fever, a complaint which is very prevalent in the Shilluk country at the beginning and end of the rains.

The victim, for although the hairdressing process is both painless and voluntary, I can call him nothing else, squatted on the ground, happily for me, outside the *tukl*, but nevertheless in the hot steamy atmosphere of 102° F. in the shade. His disarranged hair was then thoroughly washed in the urine of a cow, during which operation vermin literally swarmed over the head and shoulders of the sitter as well as over the hands and arms of the savage hairdresser. When this process had been completed the hair was allowed to steam in the hot sun glare for about half an hour, while an animated conversation was being carried on with a circle of squatting onlookers. These latter had either completed this portion of their toilet or were waiting with that laudable object in view, quite regardless of the fact that it might be three or four



hours before they could sit on the curious little three-legged stool which appeared to be the Shilluk equivalent of the old barber's pole.

It is unnecessary to say here that while this drying process was taking place the atmosphere in the near vicinity was by no means ambrosial, and I therefore seized the opportunity to obtain a breath of air from the neighbouring swamp while examining a Shilluk household. Each family occupies two or three huts, enclosed, together with a small stable, by a dhurra-stalk fence. Inside this little compound everything is, curiously enough, kept scrupulously clean and tidy by the women. One hut, or *tukl*, is occupied by the householder and his wife, another is used as a kitchen, and the third is



SHILLUK BARBER'S STOOL

occupied by the servants and the children. The conical roof and circular walls of almost every hut and fence are remarkably well thatched. This, I understand, is largely due to the fact that this craft, like those of hairdressing, basket-making, pottery, pipe-making, canoe-building and spear-making are hereditary trades.

The domestic life of the Shilluk family, however, must be left for description in later pages, as the time had come for my return to the interesting, if repulsive, work of hairdressing. Only a thin film of noxious vapour now arose from the half-dry head of the sitter, and the barber was busy preparing the ingredients



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used for neatly forming the hair in the chosen style. Into a large earthenware bowl he placed a mixture of swamp-mud, cow-dung, gum arabic and urine. This mess was stirred and pounded until it became a thick sticky paste, which was worked into the hair while warm and moist. There was a certain crude skill in the way in which the disgusting mass of hair was then fashioned into a kind of halo, because this had to be done by expert fingers while the pomade was drying and hardening in the scorching sunlight.

All stray hairs which would have detracted from the neatness of this remarkable coiffure were cut off with a sharp knife as soon as the reeking head had dried sufficiently for this purpose. The neck, face, shoulders, arms and body of the sitter were then carefully washed, to erase drips and stains, in the liquid mentioned. In order to avoid referring more frequently than is absolutely necessary for the purposes of faithful description to what is an objectionable subject, it should be remarked here that men, women and children of the Shilluk race bathe completely in urine, often while it is being emitted from the domestic cow before or after milking. The origin and purpose of this appalling custom I could not discover with any certainty, but it seems probable that the object is to free themselves from the attentions of swarms of flies and mosquitoes.

The hair was then dusted over with burnt cow-dung ash and red earth, in order to give it the tint required. It appears that two heads are usually dressed alike,



so that one man can see and admire his own coiffure by looking at that of another. Certainly a most ingenious method of overcoming the disadvantage of having no mirrors. The morning's work cost each of the two men concerned a sheep or a goat, and I was fortunately able, after much persuasion, to induce them to pose for their photographs.

Investigation in other parts of the Shilluk country established the fact that it was particularly the custom for young men to have their hair dressed before courting or buying a wife, and also a day or so previous to one of their weird girl, war, rain, death or Nyikwang dances. That fashion in hairdressing is not confined to Mayfair, Fifth Avenue or the Rue de la Paix is proved beyond dispute by the fact that at the moment of writing the prevailing mode in northern Shilluk-land is the tam-o'-shanter style, while midway down this strip of Equatorial Africa cockscombs are in vogue, and in the extreme south, bordering the great swamps, what is best described as the cone is considered far more becoming among the male *jeunesse*.

One would naturally be inclined to think that a custom universally adopted by a savage race would not involve any great discomfort. This, however, is certainly not the case with the Shilluks. The hairdressing just described forms one of the principal items of expenditure—always in sheep, goats, cattle, fish-hooks or spears—of the young men of this queer tribe, whose clothes consist of a single piece of rust-coloured cloth of local manufacture and a few amulets



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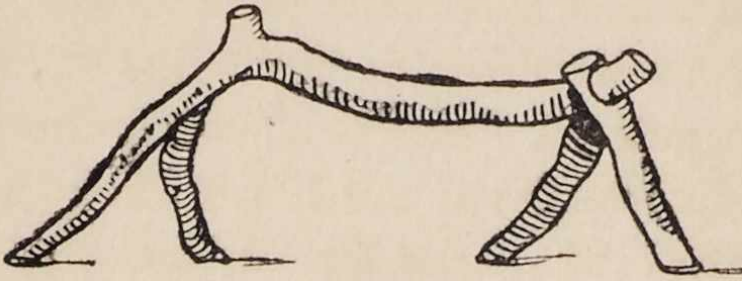
and necklaces. For this reason great care has to be taken not to allow any irritation of the scalp to cause unseemly scratching, which would quickly disarrange this expensive head-dress. To provide for this very natural contingency, short sticks are placed through the hair before it becomes an almost solid mass of mud. These can afterwards be left in the holes so made and judiciously used to allay irritation or for castigating the unruly and increasing guests. Similarly, it is of the utmost importance to avoid being drenched in one of the peculiarly fierce tropical storms which, during August and September, sweep across this wild land. A catastrophe of this kind is always attributed to *Jok*, the God of the Shilluk, invisible, formless, omnipresent and only approachable through the intercession of Nyikwang.

The greatest discomfort caused by this custom of fantastic hairdressing undoubtedly occurs every night, when the men are compelled to sleep with their necks only supported by wooden pillows or rests, so as to avoid an awful awakening in the morning, with the pride and glory of the night before hopelessly crushed and misshapen. Relief comes on the death of a near relative, when age renders it impossible to compete for woman's favour or, more frequently, when they can no longer endure the biting and stinging of countless vermin. Then must they hide their shaven heads until *Jok* sends them a new crop of hair and a life of misery because of it.

How different is the lot of the Shilluk girl. Tall



and slim, with unusual grace, glossy black skin, large bright eyes and only about a dozen tight little curls at the back of her bullet-like head to worry about. Yet there are few more laughing, joyous crowds of young men, as well as of women and children, than are to be seen moving about any of these villages when the toil of the day is over. It is true, however, that war, pestilence, poison, feuds, sudden death, treachery and debauch are everywhere rife, but if life is often



SHILLUK NECK-REST

Made from the branch of a tree with two supports added at one end. Height varies from 6 in. to 9 in.

short it certainly seems full of interest, freedom and joy.

There is another and more cruel side to the character of these people, which only came to my notice after I had been moving about among them for some days. Every Shilluk boy, before he can join in a war-dance or accompany his elders on a raid, has to undergo a truly barbarous initiation ceremony. When there are sufficient youths of about 15 or 16 years of age in a village to make the holding of a ceremony worth while, it is duly announced to take place on a certain day, and is heralded every morning for a week previous by the beating of the tom-tom.

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On the occasion in question, which took place in a small village between Kodok and Lul, there were eight boys ready to undergo the operation and these were led to the edge of the river by their sweethearts. Each girl held her young man's head over the water and encouraged him to bear the pain of what was to follow. A special doctor approached the victims in turn and cut their foreheads with a sharp knife. No sound escaped the tightly pursed lips of the initiates, for to have cried out would have meant disgrace. The girls then bathed the awful wounds with water from the river and the ceremony was over. All boys initiated in the same year belong to the same age-class, to which is given the name of some animal considered to be typical of the behaviour of the class. The Leonard Clan signifies a class which crouched for the operation and whose character should be fierce and prone to stealthy attack. Similarly, the Cobra Clan writhed with the pain and dashed away into the jungle without waiting for the washing of its wounds.

So dangerous is this form of cicatrization, which is supposed to give the young men of the tribe more courage to face hostile spears, that an artery is often severed and the boy dies from loss of blood in his loved one's arms. Those who survive are given a share in the family cattle, can enter any of the tribal dances and are henceforward looked upon as men. Until this ceremony is performed, however, they are protected by every member of the tribe from injury



in war or feuds, and often live in the servants' hut.

Later on, during my sojourn among these savages, I was able to witness a "girl" and a "rain" dance, together with a part of the dreadful sequel to the former, but this was still far ahead and must be described in its proper place. The Shilluks, unlike the mysterious Nubas who live in the mountains to the west, are a riverain people, engaged mostly in cattle breeding, fishing and hunting. Their vast herds afford them but little material gain, however, being used very largely for barter between themselves. The cow is regarded as sacred, although they drink considerable quantities of the milk of this animal as well as that of the goat. Cattle are seldom killed for meat or exchanged with other tribes. They appear to represent a kind of dormant wealth or currency, with which to purchase wives.

The Shilluk country is very swampy near the rivers, especially during the flood season from September to November. Inland, towards the Nuba Mountains, it is, however, covered with thorn bush, open grass prairies and narrow belts of tropical forest. *Ful sudani*, which forms a staple article of food, is obtained by barter from the Nubas, as the lowland soil is composed of almost perpetually wet clay, and is consequently quite unsuited for the cultivation of earth nuts. These giant people of the African wilds, although expert hunters, as I soon discovered after a hippopotamus adventure in their company, are constitutionally



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lazy, with but few wants in this life or the next. They do, however, cultivate small patches of dhurra, tobacco and maize.

The climate, which undoubtedly plays a big part in man's activities, is very hot and damp. The year may be divided into two seasons; the dry period, lasting from December to April, and the wet season, from May to October. The hottest month is usually April, just before the rains, and the time when both earth and air reach their maximum point of saturation is during August. The flood season along the rivers lasts from September to November. Violent thunderstorms, when the whole sky is ablaze from horizon to zenith, occur in August and September. During these months the number and ferocity of the mosquitoes and other insects also reach their maximum point. Curiously, however, these tropical pests are conspicuously absent during the months of January and February, and it becomes a scientific problem, in view of the moist heat, as to the habitat and activities of the mosquito in the dry season.

With these climatic disadvantages it is but natural that the Shilluks should not be cultivators of the soil. They live very largely on fish, game, dhurra, *ful sudani* and the native intoxicant called *merissa*. Their fishing operations are usually conducted, with spears and harpoons, from the lightest and most curious of native craft. For the purpose of constructing canoes they use *doleib* palms, hollowed out and pointed bow and stern with hard wood. The three sections of



these fairly long but slender craft are lashed together with *saaf* rope, made from the *dom* palm, and have the appearance of being liable to fall apart on the slightest provocation from a playful crocodile, hippopotamus or even lethargic Nile turtle.

Another means of water transport which is very frequently seen, especially on the Sobat River, is the *ambach* raft. These canoe-shaped structures, which are capable of supporting at least two of these giant blacks, weigh only a few pounds, being made from branches of the *ambach* tree, which grows in profusion on the banks and is literally as light as cork. These rafts, or more properly canoes, are not watertight, but float owing to the lightness of the wood. The *ambach* stems taper from the roots and are lashed together in such a way as to form the most handy and well-shaped of little boats. The great advantage which they possess over the larger and heavier *doleib* palm canoes is that of being easily carried on a man's head when away on a hunting expedition. The only disadvantage of using them is that one's feet and legs are continually wet and that the canoes, themselves, have to be dried periodically in the sun, otherwise they become waterlogged and dangerous.

While the Shilluks and, to a lesser degree, the Dinkas live in large villages there are many tribes further south, such as the Nuers and Baris, who dare not live in a group exceeding that of a single family confined in four or five huts. The reason for this is private feud and quarrel, as apart from tribal warfare. No

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man, unless he be a maniac, is more susceptible to sudden and uncontrollable fits of rage over unimportant trifles than the true savage, and for certain races to live in villages would mean continuous bloodshed.

The Shilluks, who have a very close tribal organization and law, are immune from these disadvantages, but, nevertheless, they sometimes employ the poison used on the tips of their spears for purposes of revenge. The Mek never eats or drinks until one of his attendants has first tasted the food or liquid, and feuds between different villages or sub-chiefs are common. One of these tribal wars, which commenced in November, 1924, was still in progress, and at one time threatened to cut off my retreat to the opposite side of a river.

About the ornaments worn by Shilluk belles very little can be said here, for they consist principally of elaborate necklaces made of blue, brown, white and green beads. These necklaces, which are often made by special craftsmen, consist of row upon row of beads, covering much of the neck and bosom. They represent wealth and are also worn by the men. Blue is considered a lucky colour, and almost every otherwise naked child has a blue bead necklet or bracelet, which varies from a single bead to a complete circle, according to the wealth of the parents. The younger men often wear fur anklets, and some have the ivory armlet which signifies that the wearer has killed an elephant, a lion or a leopard with his spear! Shining brass and



grass-rope bands round the arms of the men are common and, occasionally, a crude form of sandal, made of hippopotamus hide, is worn. The men never cook, fetch water or cultivate the fields, unless very old, for these tasks are considered to be the work of women and girls, who also make the crude earthenware jars and pots used for cooking and the manufacture of *merissa*.

One sweltering hot afternoon, in the little village of Lul, which stands on high ground some distance inland from the river-bank, I saw the final stage in the manufacture of the intoxicating *merissa*. It seems that a quantity of dhurra is placed in a basket which is made watertight with a mixture of clay and cow-dung dried in the sun. This curious utensil and its contents are then placed in the stagnant water of a pond for about a week in order to ferment. The final stage consists of transferring the fermented dhurra into earthenware pots, in which it is boiled with water. The top liquid is then drained off and allowed to cool. Further supplies of *merissa* are obtained by adding water to the dhurra and reboiling it.

While watching the women engaged in these operations I was offered a drink of this foul-looking beverage, but even the young lady's action in rubbing her stomach appreciatively as a sign that I should enjoy it, combined with a thirst produced by an absence of four hours from camp in a temperature of over 100° F. in the shade, were not sufficiently seductive to obliterate the remembrance that the basket in which its principal

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ingredients had fermented for over a week was rendered watertight mainly with cow-dung.

Near Lul there is an Austrian Mission Station, from one of the Fathers of which I obtained some most valuable information, especially relating to the installation of the Mek, or king, on the banks of the Sacred River. Unfortunately one of these brave missionaries died of fever on the river, when returning from leave, while I was passing through the country, and this naturally cast a gloom over the isolated community. Mention must also be made here of the arduous, lonely and dangerous work—both to life and health—of the few Government Commissioners in these thousands of square miles of savage country.

Among the explorers who have done more than skirt round, or pass through this region by the great river road into Equatorial Africa, there appears to be a belief that the food of the Shilluks consists largely of meat. This is totally incorrect. Raw hippopotamus flesh and fish are certainly eaten, but the flesh of animals is consumed only during tribal feasts. At first sight it also appears that the food of these savages is always the same, but, here again, tactful investigation proved how unwise it is to jump to conclusions. For example, earth nut, or *ful sudani*, is ground up with dhurra and raw fish. The resulting paste comes out of the earthenware cooking pot in tiny balls about the size of a pea. A similar, but totally different tasting dish, is made by mixing hippopotamus meat with ground-up earth nut and a herb called *sasaf*.



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It was in a large village, some five miles south-west of Lul, that I succeeded in witnessing a "girl" dance and, incidentally, had a narrow escape from the spear thrust of a drunken savage. It was a wild night of *merissa* drinking, dancing, savage love-making and debauch, which the custom of holding it during the period of full moon, when the more open African forest is almost as light as day, rendered indescribably Bacchanalian and barbaric.

## CHAPTER VI

### A Wild Night Orgy—& its Sequel

**T**HERE is something uncanny and singularly disturbing in the dull, soulless throb of the African war-drum when heard, without knowing its meaning, while shoulder-deep in the rank grass of a dried-up swamp. This was the first indication I received that something abnormal was about to happen among the pointed *tukls* now close ahead, to which I was bound from the neighbouring village of Lul, for the purpose of inspecting one of the most sacred of the shrines of Nyikwang—the mythical, ancestral spirit which plays such a prominent part in the religion and life of the savage and somewhat treacherous Shilluk.

My anxiety on hearing the rhythmic beat of the tom-tom was certainly not eased by the knowledge that somewhere in the surrounding wilderness two powerful sub-tribal chiefs had been at war with each other for two years. However, the native guide who accompanied me from camp had once been a soldier in a Sudanese Battalion and, although since leaving the army he had reverted completely to the savage state, he could, nevertheless, still speak in a monosyllabic way quite a lot of both English and Arabic, and was therefore invaluable.



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From him I learned that the beating of the war-drum at this hour in the morning was merely a form of publicity. It not only notified to the whole tribe that a dance would be held that night, but also, by a variation of beat, gave out whether it would be a "girl," "Nyikwang," "war," "rain" or "death" dance. After listening intently for a few seconds he declared that it signified the first of these forms of savage revelry, and explained that girl dances began directly the moon rose above the horizon of forest, which I judged to be about seven o'clock, and took place on ten successive nights while the village was bathed in silver light.

About my inspection of the tall, pointed and stockade-enclosed Shrine of Nyikwang I will say nothing here, because this queer cult, with its sacrificial rites, dogmas and mysticism—affecting every act in the life of these savages—is a subject which can best be made intelligible by separate treatment later on. Even though it meant, as afterwards proved correct, a hasty retreat during the hours of semi-darkness through the snake-infested grass jungle, back to my camp near Lul, I quickly made up my mind to seize the opportunity that had so miraculously presented itself, and stay in the village, which then seemed to be quite a peaceful sort of place, and see all that was possible of the wild night orgy which past experience of savage dances in other far-distant lands caused me to anticipate.

Taking careful stock of the situation during the day,

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I realized there was a certain element of risk attached to the venture. My only hope of being allowed to witness anything seemed to depend upon making friends with some of the younger men, who would certainly be present at an affair of this kind, and I proceeded to put this portion of my plan into execution with quite good results. I knew also of the immense quantities of intoxicating *merissa* which are consumed during these tribal dances, and this, combined with the reputation for savage treachery which the Shilluk has earned among other tribes, counselled both caution and the establishment of a definite line of retreat.

Upon leaving camp that morning I had intended being away only a few hours, for the purpose of inspecting the Nyikwang Shrine, and had, very foolishly, neglected to bring any weapon other than a small revolver and a curious Indian sword-stick, which I always use as a riding crop. If the worst came I should have to rely upon the prestige of the white man rather than upon the more solid foundation of adequate defence. Whatever authority a white man may be able to exercise over a sober tribe, little can be either expected or even hoped for when dealing with drunken savages.

To provide for the possibility of a retreat, if events took an ugly turn, I paid particular attention to the native track leading across the swamp, and also to the quickest way of reaching this from the centre of the village. Against sober savages with such fine physique



as that of the Shilluks even a successful retreat would not be practicable, but it was the intoxicated element which I feared most, and these would not leave the *merissa* jars for long, so I felt tolerably secure.

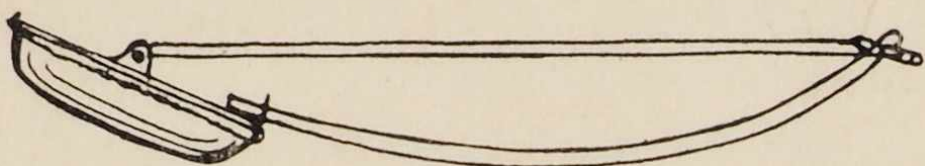
The only alternative to this course was to give up going to the first night's dance and return, better equipped, on the succeeding day. This would, undoubtedly, have been the most sensible way, but my time at Lul was limited if I was to reach regions still far distant before the rainy season made travel impossible, and, moreover, I did not feel inclined to repeat the ten miles' tramp, in stifling heat, through the swamp on the following day.

It appears that the principal object of these "girl" dances is very similar to that of the "Paul Jones" at home. They enable boys and girls to overcome natural reticence and get better acquainted with each other, but the young savage's conception of acquaintance, friendship and love seems to be a little at fault, as subsequent events will show. I was repeatedly told during the day by the younger men, whose good-will I particularly sought, that they were "going for girls," and, in consequence, they spent the hours before sunset dressing themselves in leopard and wild-cat skins, fastening ostrich feathers on to their spears, and in elaborately arranging their hair, adding additional rows of coloured beads, and confining the muscles of their arms in bands of horn, wire and rope.

A Shilluk village is usually built in a circle. The open space in the centre contains a kind of meeting-

place for men only, together with the *Kengo*, or Shrine of Nyikwang. It was inside this ring of straw huts that both young and old began to assemble long before sunset. Great jars of *merissa* were placed by the older women at convenient points within the circle, together with dishes of dhurra and half-raw meat.

When the copper-coloured moon silhouetted the distant fringe of jungle and the semicircle of pointed *tukls*, all the older men and women formed a ring in line with the *merissa* jars, while the young people assembled in the centre. The chattering, laughing,



SHILLUK STRING MUSICAL INSTRUMENT

The strings are of animal gut and the circular base is made of turtle-shell.

capering and excitement were intense. To those unversed in the child-like ways of truly savage peoples it might almost have seemed that no such event had ever taken place before. Then came the chief and his attendants, carrying the war-drum and two instruments not unlike the ukelele. Almost instantly the chattering and laughing ceased. The groups of girls and boys mingled and finally dissolved into two lines. Next came the curious beat of the tom-tom and the low wail of the two string instruments. Every now and then the circle of semi-naked squatting figures broke in with a chant.

With startling suddenness the wailing ceased and



the beat of the drum was increased. A line of spears flashed in the moonlight and some 200 feet began a curious shuffling step. First one and then another young brave would leave the ranks and dash into the centre between the shuffling line of boys and girls. Here he crouched, with spear at the ready, then lunged, stumbled, recovered himself, lunged again, jumped to one side and finally drove his weapon into the ground while making a loud hissing noise. Each time this mimic battle—which I afterwards learned symbolized the killing of a wild beast—was concluded the chanting and wailing were renewed.

It would be difficult to imagine a more barbaric scene. The circle of huddled figures, lines of giant savages with tossing plumes and stamping, fur-clad bodies and ankles, the low jingle of necklaces, the rhythmic beat of the tom-tom, the wail of the turtle-shell and gut instruments, and the glint of the brilliant moonlight on the polished steel of broad spear blades made an unforgettable sight. After about an hour of mimic fighting, during which time the *merissa* was flowing all round the squatting circle, another group of boys and girls took upon themselves the heat and action of the dance, while the other young giants lifted up huge earthenware pots and gulped down draughts of the most unpalatable of intoxicants. Then came a general dance in which the line of boys, without spears, advanced and obtained partners from the line of girls. Each couple, with elbows raised in a line with their shoulders, jumped, body to body and

in time, but not clasping or even holding each other.

Some time before midnight the dance became a drunken revel, and in order to keep a small group of immense and excited savages amused I flashed the light from my pocket torch on to their faces. For a time this ruse succeeded, and shrieks of frenzied joy accompanied each flash, but as the *merissa* began to have effect one or two became bad tempered and went through the actions of stabbing me with their long broad-bladed spears. Thinking it was time to change my tactics I made one of those senseless blunders to which even the most cautious are liable in similar moments.

The scene around is impossible to describe. Even the sequels to those Bacchanalian feasts of ancient Rome are popularly supposed to have been covered by a thin veneer of refinement, but the love-making—if such it can be called—of these young savages, after their elders had retired discreetly to their huts, literally beggars description. More need not be said, for the sight was no longer barbaric but repulsive and sickening. Intending to get away with Abdul, the guide, and being lulled into a false sense of security by the absence of any threatening symptoms, such as I have experienced on similar occasions elsewhere in the savage world, I decided to show the small group, which still hovered around in spite of the greater attractions elsewhere, a last trick and make my escape while they were discussing it. What I was particularly anxious



to avoid was being accompanied into the swamp by these intoxicated and over-excited Shilluks.

Taking the long spear out of the unresisting hands of one 7-foot savage I pretended to admire it and return the weapon to its owner. I then held up my own insignificant and harmless-looking cane. This caused a laugh of derision and one rather bad-tempered individual wanted to fight me, so I chose him for the experiment. Making the usual mystic passes over the stick I suddenly drew the thin steel sword from its innocent-looking case. For a brief instant the moonlight glinted on the thin polished blade and then, to my horror, I realized the awful mistake that had been made.

What form of mental aberration caused me to do such a stupid and thoughtless trick I cannot say, but it came very close to costing me my life. As I triumphantly flashed the little sword from its wooden scabbard the savage nearest me sprang back, his *merissa*-muddled brain suspecting treachery, and lunged at me with his 10-foot spear. I jumped aside not a second too soon. The tip of the broad shining head plucked a hole in my drill trousers. Had I stumbled, or if any of the others had attacked simultaneously, this story would never have been written. As it was I found myself in a ring of spears, with the rollicking, laughing group of a minute before a glowering circle of suspicious savages.

I frankly confess that in spite of the heat of the tropical night I shuddered. For a brief instant my

brain seemed paralysed, not so much by the nearness of death, I sincerely hope, as by the loss of that complete confidence in one's own ability which is so essential in a moment of emergency. The hideous mistake I had made dawned on me in a flash and I hesitated. Happily the circle round me wavered also, and in that brief respite I succeeded by an almost superhuman effort in recovering confidence. With a laugh, the hollowness of which would have been apparent to any but savages, I dropped the sword on to the ground and moved towards the young giant who had nearly ended my existence. Pointing to the length of my little toy, compared with his long spear, I ridiculed by look and gesture any question of a fight. Slowly I extracted a grin of appreciation from the hideous, scowling faces around, with what relief I cannot express, and the worst of the danger appeared to be over.

Not caring to trust myself any longer than was necessary to restore a resemblance of the former good relationship, I signified a desire for sleep, by laying my head in my hands, and with considerable misgiving turned my back and walked past several lovers in the shade of the *tukls* and the trees towards Abdul and the entrance to the trail across the swamp.



## CHAPTER VII

### The Mysterious Cult of Nyikwang

**T**HE more intimate and personal things in the life of a savage tribe, while often the most interesting and instructive, are far more difficult to discover than the generalities of religion, war and sport. Among the most curious of Shilluk customs are those pertaining to marriage. In order to make a study of this subject I considered it advisable, after the episode related in the previous chapter, to move my camp some forty miles nearer to the Sobat, and in a small village almost opposite Taufikia I was present at one of these remarkable ceremonies.

Among the Shilluks marriage does not take place until the girl has reached fifteen or sixteen years of age, and then, through the medium of the "girl" dance, she is able to become acquainted with many of the eligible young men of her sub-tribe. As all wives are purchased by the exchange of cattle, and a man may buy as many as he can afford, it may be thought that marriage is scarcely the correct term to apply. Before a girl can be purchased from her father or brothers she must, however, give consent to the transaction, and, as a general rule, only does this after

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periods of flirtation at the dance and discovering someone whom she loves and who is also a good worker. For this reason, when a young Shilluk is thinking seriously of marriage he endeavours by every possible means to increase his herds and to cultivate patches of dhurra, for food, and tobacco, for enjoyment and barter.

It is curious that even a savage girl should give preference to a man who, through industry, is not only in a better position to maintain her, but can also, if he so desires, purchase other wives. Regarding this point I could, however, obtain no satisfactory explanation. Marriage is preceded by engagement, as among civilized people, and a small payment of about ten goats, three spears or twenty fish-hooks is made to the father or brother of the girl. Conjugal relationship often begins during these engagements, but here we have the most curious of all the marriage customs.

A repetition of the events which precede Shilluk assemblies is unnecessary here. It is sufficient to say that before a marriage ceremony there is the usual beating of the tom-tom, the preparation of *merissa* and the gathering of old and young into a circle. On this particular occasion the shy bride, who was, doubtless, blushing under her blue-black skin, was led into the tribal circle by her brother. Here she was questioned by the chief, to whom all things pertaining to the lives of his people, whether great or small, are known through the system of espionage which supplies





### A SHILLUK WAR DANCE.

THE RALLY OF THE TRIBE. Only the warriors answer the call of the tom-tom. The huge shields are made of hippopotamus hide.

THE BEGINNING OF THE WAR DANCE. The ivory armlets are a sign of valour, worn only by those who have killed a lion or an elephant single-handed with a spear. Note the dagger on the arm.

THE DANCE IN FULL SWING. In the background will be seen the war-drums.

information to the Mek, or King, at Fashoda. After being threatened with trial by ordeal she was at last compelled to admit a number of love affairs. This reluctant confession seemed to meet with general approval, for there was a hubbub of conversation, followed by looks of expectation on the cruel faces in the circle around her.

After some half-hour's deliberation between the chief, the bridegroom and the elders of the tribe, the tom-tom was sounded and every noise and movement ceased. For a brief space the savage scene, in the still, hot air of the clearing, about a mile from the river-bank, seemed grotesque, unreal and picture-like. Every black giant stood motionless, leaning on his huge spear, and even the slim, central figure in this African drama appeared nonchalant and without life. Then, in answer to a demand from the chief, the girl, in low tones, repeated the names of all her boy lovers of the past. Each of these young men was then called into the circle and fined heavily, the number of cows, bulls and goats varying according to the circumstances of this Shilluk crime. Finally, the little accumulated herd was driven into the circle and presented as a dowry to the husband. Subsequently I learned that no punishment was inflicted on the girl unless she refused to confess when the circumstances were known to the chief and were admitted by the men, and that no stigma was attached to any of the male culprits. The public confession and the fines were considered a sufficient atonement, and the



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incident would be forgotten before the next marriage ceremony took place.

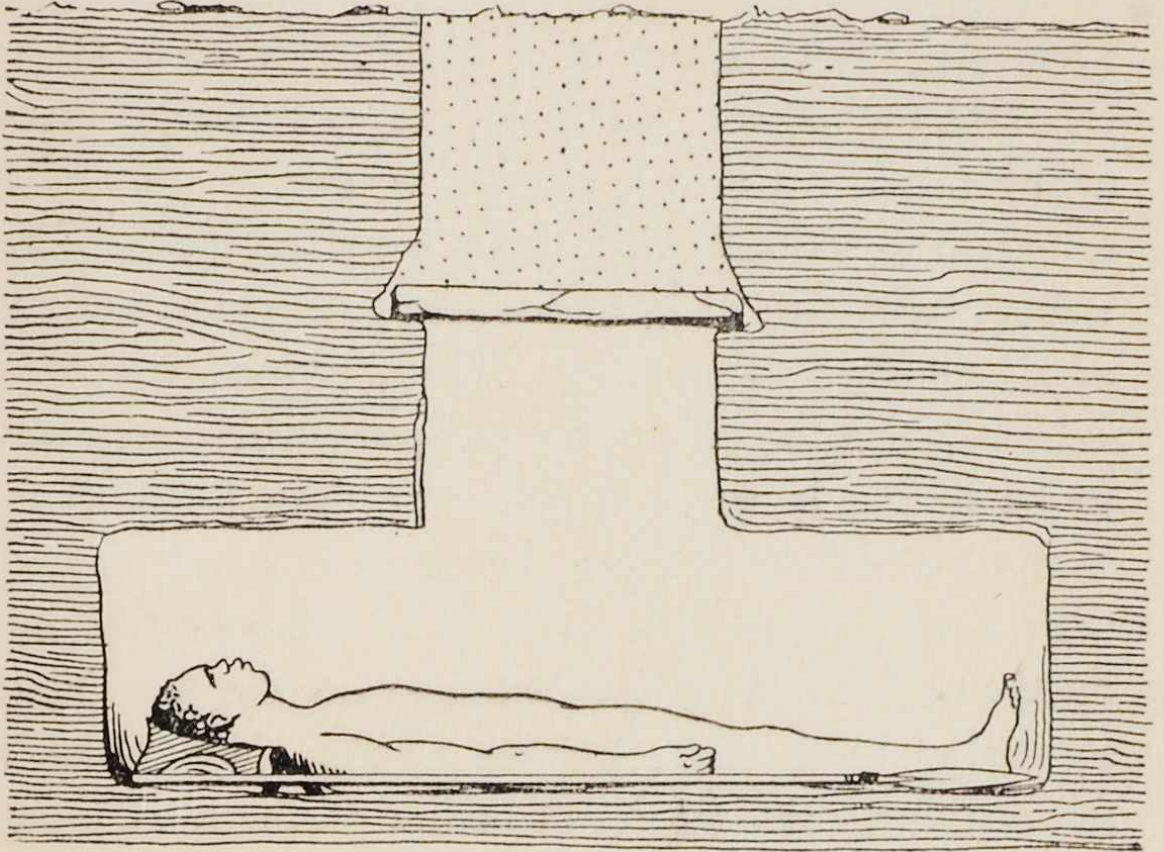
From the dancing, drinking and debauch which followed it would seem that the whole idea was not to check immorality, but rather to provide additional herds for the young couple and to supply a sensation and the opportunity for a feast to the onlookers. On the birth of a male child small presents are given to the father, such as a goat or a cow, and the process of nature causes these to multiply into the nucleus of a herd by the time the boy has reached manhood. The increased birth-presents are then handed over by the father to the son, after the initiation ceremony of the latter, as the beginning of his means of livelihood and wealth.

The death of a Shilluk is also the occasion of an elaborate ceremony. The grave is prepared—for these savages bury their dead just outside the hut in which the deceased lived—in the manner shown in the illustration. The body, wrapped in the best garment possessed during life, and accompanied by spears, hooks, cooking utensils and everything necessary for maintaining life in a future world, except personal adornments, is laid to rest, with the neck supported on the wooden pillow if a man, and on a grass mat if a woman or child. A chief is, however, buried just inside the doorway of his hut, which is then closed up and remains empty for a year, when it is pulled down.

During the "death" dance which follows, all the

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relatives of the deceased cover themselves with the greyish white ash of burnt cow-dung, and chant mournfully to the slow beat of the tom-tom. The dancers go through a performance which seems to depict the bravery or lovableness of the departed and the arrival of the spirit in the "Land of his People."



SHILLUK GRAVE

There appears to be no uniform depth, size, or exact shape.

Food and drink are brought to the bereaved relatives and the usual vast quantities of *merissa* are consumed. Before the sunrise of a new day sorrow is forgotten in the drunken sleep which follows a night of unbridled licence.

The "war" dance of the Shilluks consists, principally, of a mimic battle followed by the capture of



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women, children and cattle. It is the one dance which may be held at any time of the day, in immediate answer to the rally sounded on the drum. When it is known beforehand that a war-dance will take place all the Shilluk braves put on their finery, including hats made of the skins of small animals, ostrich and other birds' plumes, leopard skins, lions' manes and bead necklaces. With spears and knobkerries held aloft the line of warriors advances, retreats, wheels and finally breaks up into a number of groups who stab the earth so viciously that spears are often broken and wrists dislocated. It is, undoubtedly, the most savage of all similar performances. Then, rushing into the *tukl*, in which the girls of the vanquished are supposed to be hiding in sheer fright, they drag forth their captives amid ear-piercing shrieks and deposit them, with a roughness which seems to be cheerfully borne by the unfortunate girls selected to act the part, in a squirming black mass in front of the chief. Blood streams down the faces and bodies of the men from cuts and scratches received in these mimic battles. The medicine men apply mud mixed with the juice of certain roots to these minor wounds.

In November, 1924, a quarrel between two sub-chiefs resulted in a war, which was gradually extended by adherents to each side until hundreds of savages were involved in the dispute. During the first battle ten were killed on one side and only three on the other. This produced a blood-feud, which was still in progress and often caused me great anxiety, because, in the

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whirl of a native rising, it is almost impossible to travel by day or night without taking grave risks from poisoned spears, man-traps and murder for the sake of the firearms to be obtained.

However, all went well, and the only fighting I saw in the Shilluk country was more amusing than otherwise. The opposing parties were divided by the Upper Nile, near Lul, at one point and by the Sobat River, near Tawfikia, at another. An *ambach* canoe from the west bank of the former stream, containing two men who were evidently out hunting and fishing, drifted close in to the east bank of the river. From among the swamp grass on this side a hostile canoe put out to chase the enemy. Both these two little craft became partially unmanageable, and while throwing spears at each other one man fell overboard.

In northern rivers such an occurrence would simply mean an uncomfortable wetting, but here, in the crocodile-infested waters, it was a more serious matter and the man made a frantic effort to get back over the bow of the canoe. Evidently the little craft refused to tolerate such treatment and promptly turned over, throwing the other two men of the attacking force into the river. By this time the *ambach* raft of the defenders had been successfully manœuvred close in to its own bank, and when the accident occurred to the enemy craft the two savages leapt out and danced with joy on the bank, threatening to spear the enemy if they landed on that side of the river.



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Although nearer to the hostile shore the three men in the water struck out manfully for their own side of the stream and succeeded in getting through the broad fringe of reeds and rank grass. No sooner had they landed than two of them turned on the one who had caused the mishap and beat him unmercifully with their spear-shafts, much to the amusement of their enemies on the opposite bank. This feud will last until seven of the other side have been killed to equalize the losses, and any interference by military forces sent from far-distant Khartoum would be intensely resented and probably prove ineffective. Being contrary to tribal law to settle this dispute in any other way than by equalizing the losses, what could not be accomplished by open fighting would in all probability be carried out by stealthy murder or poison. A tribal war of this kind means that the inhabitants of one village never approach those of another, and white travellers in the country who might have relied upon local transport would be unable to move. Here it should be said that among the Shilluks, Dinkas and Nuers carriers are extremely difficult to obtain.

Although, of course, there is no written history of the Shilluk race, from what I could learn, supplemented by occasional references made in the works of early explorers, it seems practically certain that these giants came originally from the far south and were afterwards separated by internecine warfare. The existence of this nation in its present territories

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dates back about four centuries only, according to Father Banholzer of the Mission Station at Lul. Previous to that the same authority considers that these people came from the shores of the great Central African Lakes, passing through the Bahr-el-Ghazal region. James Bruce mentions a tribe, called Shilluks, who came from a land to the west of the White Nile and invaded Sennar in 1504. Very scanty mention of this race appears in the works of any of the explorers until as late as 1861, when we learn that the Shilluk country was overrun by the Selim Baggara Arabs, under a holy man named Mohamed Kheir. Four years later Sir Samuel Baker established a temporary camp near Fashoda for the suppression of the slave trade.

A rising of the Shilluks against the old Egyptian Government of the Sudan occurred in 1874 and was suppressed by a force under Gessi Pasha. In 1882 a concentration of troops at Kaka, the northernmost group of Shilluk villages, was made for the purpose of advancing across country to Jebel Gedir, in the Nuba Mountains, where the Mahdi had established himself for the conduct of his Holy War, but this force was cut to pieces in the dense forests. During the Mahdia, in 1890, the Shilluks rebelled against the Dervish slave-raiders, and the Emir Zaki Tamal invaded the country, but was frequently defeated. Two years later, however, a Dervish army finally overcame all resistance and thousands of Shilluk slaves were carried off to Omdurman. The result of this gigantic slave raid is



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apparent to this day, for the Shilluks prefer a foreigner of any kind to an Arab, who, as a race, are greatly mistrusted and disliked.

It is believed that the Shilluk and Dinka of the Upper Nile, the Acholi, Kavirondo, Alier and other tribes of Northern Uganda, as well as the Jurs and Bellanda of the Bahr-el-Ghazal, originally belonged to one family on account of the affinity of language. It is, however, a curious fact that the Dinkas, who are neighbours of the Shilluks, are nevertheless further removed from them in point of language than the Acholi, whose habitat is over a thousand miles away. On the other hand the Dinkas have certain customs which resemble those of the Shilluks. This provides an excellent example of the difficulty of sorting out the races of Central Africa.

Although the god of the Shilluks is called *Jok*, and there appears to be a different and all-powerful Creator, or *Jok*, for almost every activity of life, such as war, hunting, cultivation, birth and death, the religion of this giant race is best described as the worship of Nyikwang. This curious cult is a mixture of spiritualism, ancestor-worship and pure paganism, which has no exact counterpart among the religions and mythologies of other African tribes. The Shilluks consider that their first ancestor was Nyikwang, who now acts in the spirit world as an intermediary between themselves and the haughty unapproachable *Jok*. In times of adversity they say, "*Jok* has cursed me!" but pray to Nyikwang in order that he may

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intercede with the angered Creator. The spirit of this mythical being, or demi-god, is considered to be immanent in the personality of each successive Mek. The spirits of the dead are believed to possess the power not only of communicating with human beings in dreams, but also of altering the character of young people. They say, for example, "that was his father's act," when referring to some noticeable hereditary trait, or, "that was her Grandmother's love." Curiously, however, royal descent is only recognized up to the fourth generation, because it is believed that the spirits of ancestors further removed have but little influence over earthly affairs.

The Shilluk aristocracy consist of the Mek (*Ret*), his children (*Nia-ret*), his grandchildren (*Ni-aret*), and his great grandchildren (*Kwañi-aret*), and only those of royal descent can succeed to the throne, but there are certain families who are descendants of former kings and are called *Ororo*. These possess considerable influence. There is also a powerful class called (in Arabic) *kujurs*, who are really witch-doctors, and combine the office of priest with that of the medical man. The mother of the mythical Nyikwang was *Kieya*, the patroness of crocodiles, under whose ægis comes the trial by ordeal. For this reason the crocodile is a sacred reptile to all those who have royal blood in their veins.

In every village there is a shrine, or, according to the vernacular, a "House of Nyikwang." It is usually a tall, pointed, straw-thatched *tukl*, with two ordinary



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huts, enclosed by a stockade. The actual shrine and sometimes the two adjoining *tukls* are surmounted by the eggs of the ostrich supported through their centres by a spear. The ostrich is a bird held in great reverence by the people of this tribe, because Nyikwang is believed by them to have been brought up in the desert with the ostriches, and afterwards to have decreed that this bird should therefore be held sacred.

Upon the death of a king the young wives are given to relatives, while the older ones are sent all over the Shilluk country as guardians of the Nyikwang houses. It is for these unfortunates that the huts enclosed in the sacred compound are intended. The female children of all sub-chiefs are called Daughters of Nyikwang, and when they marry the bridegroom must make a sacrifice to the spirit of Nyikwang's wife, which resides in a crocodile. Usually a goat is killed on the river-bank and the blood which is allowed to drain out of the carcase into the water attracts numerous reptiles to the scene. So far as I could ascertain the meat is reserved for the ex-royal guardian of the local shrine.

A curious phenomenon of the vast, grassy plains of the interior is the black whirlwind. While trekking far inland, shortly after the tribal fight near Lul, we had scarcely left the belt of forest which grows within a mile or two of the west bank of the Upper Nile, and emerged on to the open plains which lead to the far distant Dar Nuba, when I noticed three black columns,

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like mammoth telegraph poles, reaching from the earth to the sky and moving erratically across country. My Shilluk carriers immediately dropped their burdens and went down on their hands and knees. After a few minutes they rose up and solemnly explained that *Jok* walks in these black whirlwinds so that he cannot be seen. The real cause is, of course, the widespread burning of the grass during the dry season. Then along come the miniature whirlwinds, whisking the black ash high into the air. Further north, on the Bayuda and Nubian Deserts, these same winds create what are there called Sand-devils. Later on, among the Red Sea Hills, I saw seven of these curiosities, which in appearance resemble waterspouts, all moving over the uplands at the same time.

When rain is required for the cattle and especially for the crops of dhurra, the *kujur* arranges for a dance to be held on three or four successive nights around the Nyikwang Shrine. These are the only dances for which ordinary, or scarcely any dress is worn, and they usually take place about sunset. It is apparent to a white man that the *kujur* waits until there has been a long drought, and, being able to read the weather signs, orders a dance to be held when rain appears to be imminent. It was truly pitiable to see these fine specimens of black humanity waiting anxiously, after the prayers of intercession to Nyikwang which follow the truly pagan dance, with upturned faces motionless, silent and full of faith, to feel the first warm spots of water from a sky which had become purple and



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covered with storm-clouds when the tom-toms heralded the dance.

The inside of a Nyikwang Shrine differs in no respect from that of the ordinary grass-hut. There appeared to be no idols, or carving, unless these are hidden and shown only during a ceremony, which, however, always seems to take place outside the tall, pointed *tukl* and its stockade. There is a wonderful collection of large brown and yellow spiders, and a low wooden altar for the occasional sacrifice of a goat, sheep or fawn, and upon it food and *merissa* are left by love-sick damsels as well as those asking for some earthly reward for faithfulness to Nyikwang.

That night while returning to camp I received a thorough drenching from the storm of rain, lightning and thunder, but the only expression of sympathy received from Abdul—whose Shilluk name sounded, phonetically, like Kirenfedol—was the cheerful assertion that *Jok* was pleased and sent the rain.

## CHAPTER VIII

### From the Sacred River to Lake No

**I**MAGINE a brown, sluggish little river, or creek, fringed here and there with papyrus and rank grass, its narrow, oily surface broken only by the ripples from a lazy crocodile, hauling itself up with repulsive, claw-like feet, on to a mud-bank, then, a dark line of forest cutting athwart the brazen, mid-day sky to the west, and all around the rank and rotting vegetation of a swamp—steaming in the hot, motionless air of the equatorial day—and you have, in this extract from rough notes, my first mental impression of the Sacred River of the Shilluks, which lies between the native villages of Kodok and Fashoda, in Lat.  $9^{\circ} 48' N$ .

Later, when I crossed this putrid stream to reach the Royal Village—which is like all the other collections of straw-thatched, mud-walled *tukls* hereabouts, except, perhaps for the many-pointed compound of the Mek—my opinion became far more emphatic as to its unsuitability as a sacred river. This, however, was largely due to the smell of tropical decay which seemed to emanate from it, and to the fact that it is just an uninteresting and everyday tributary of an Upper Nile swamp. There are, however, times when



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this semi-stagnant creek plays an important part in Shilluk life and history, for its waters have received the blood of many sacrifices, while on its banks assemble thousands of savage warriors for the coronation ceremony of these African kings.

The Mek is chosen by the hereditary sub-chiefs from among the children of royal descent, and, on being installed, comes from Fashoda, with his body-guard of spearmen, to the south bank of the Sacred River. A great assembly of all the tribes takes place. Thousands of armed warriors come thirteen and fourteen days' march, while the attendance of all the sub-chiefs and their retainers is compulsory. Arrayed in the deep waistband of red and blue, with a long striped robe and a scarlet tarbush, which are the symbols of kingship, and riding the customary donkey, the Mek of all the Shilluks appears on the river-bank surrounded by warriors, who are giants among giants, and are soberly dressed in the single-piece garment of reddish brown native cloth. (Probably dyed to save washing. I saw not a single act of cleanliness during my journey through the country.) A forest of raised spears greets the King's arrival, then the assembled thousands kneel down while this black potentate takes his seat on a leopard skin.

The people of Kaka, which is the northernmost collection of Shilluk villages, have the right to present the Mek with a white bull, while the people of the southern region, around Tonga, offer a young girl. The whole of the country is divided by the Sacred

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River into two main divisions (*Garr* and *Luak*), each of these northern and southern domains is under a head chief, while villages have their own headmen or sub-chiefs. The white bull offered by the north is led to the river-bank, opposite to where the Mek is seated. The head chief approaches the sacrifice and throws a spear at it, almost instantly the air becomes thick with flying missiles and the bull sinks down on the bank, the blood from its numerous wounds flowing into the Sacred River.

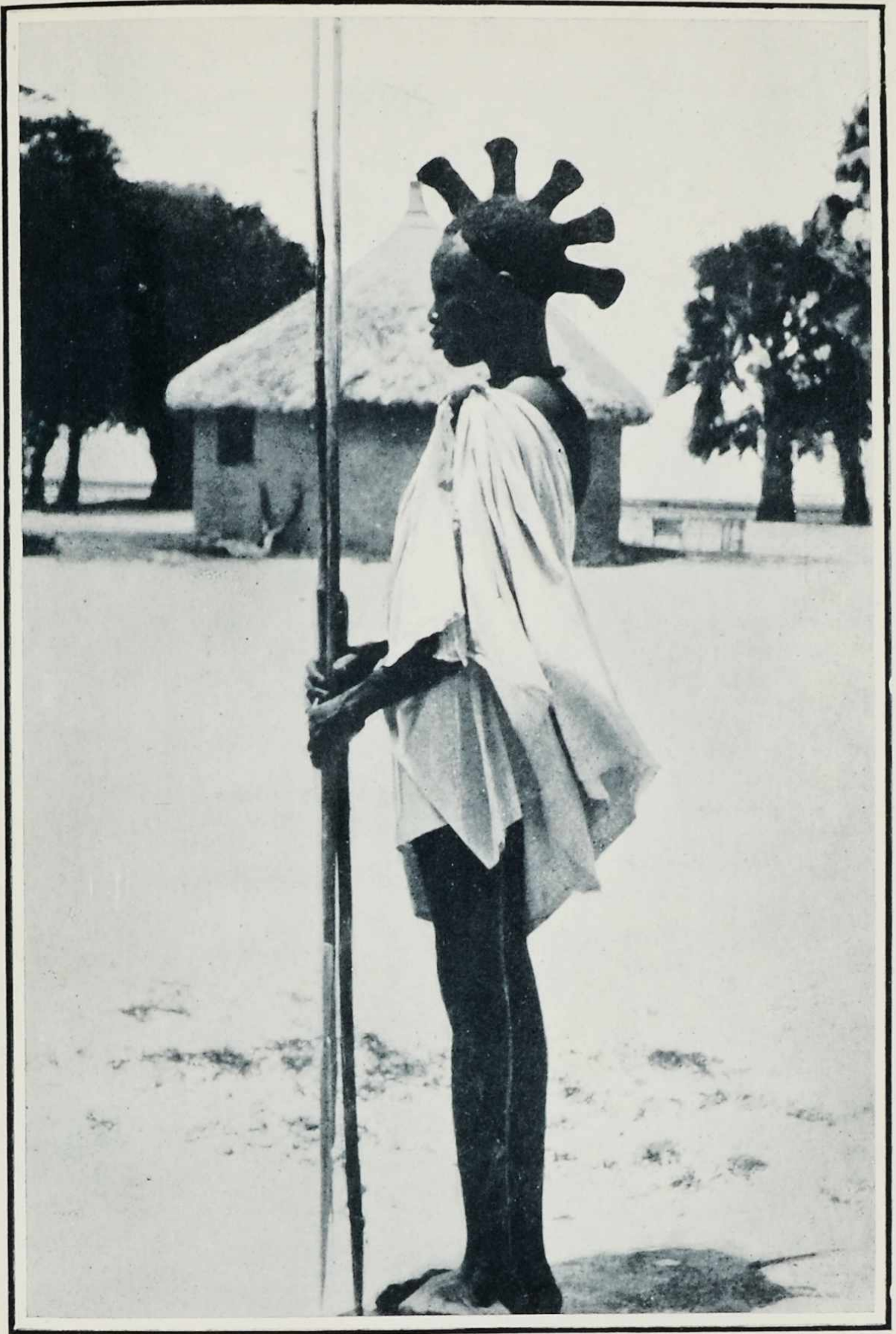
It is now the turn of the people of the south. The chief of this portion of the kingdom advances towards the Mek, leading by the hand a semi-naked girl. After a brief scrutiny of this slave the king accepts the tribute, and a wild shout of "Iwa! Iwa!" goes up from the thousands assembled on both banks. The northern tribes can now freely cross the sacred stream, and the second part of the ceremony commences. The Mek is first partially bathed in warm water and then in cold, so that he may never be too cold or too hot. He is then treated rudely and must patiently submit, so that he may always be humble. Next he is worshipped by the whole assembly on their knees, because he is the Son of Nyikwang. His feet are thrust into coarse sandals of hippopotamus hide and in these he must walk, so that he may understand poverty and suffering. The raw meat of gazelle and hippopotamus is then placed before him by slaves, so that he may always have plenty and yet eat sparingly. *Merissa* is offered in vast amounts, but is only accepted



in small quantities as a symbol of moderation. Finally, three boys run dramatically towards him with spears reversed so that the points are against their breasts and the Mek must press the shafts of these weapons sufficiently to cause blood to trickle down the naked black bodies, signifying that he will rule firmly and yet humanely.

When this long ceremony is over the Mek rises from his seat of leopard skin and addresses the chiefs. Directly the King walks forward the whole vast assembly of savages kneels in the rank grass, and this custom applies whenever this ruler walks outside his compound, all meeting him drop on both knees. When he talks, he does so slowly and all listen in deep respect, giving only an approving "Iwa! Iwa!" after each sentence.

It was about 26 miles south-west of the little administrative post of Malakal, at a point where the Upper Nile makes its great westward bend into the heart of the continent, that I was able to witness, under peculiarly fortunate circumstances, a hippopotamus hunt by a party of young Shilluks. The small native craft, or *nuggar*, in which I had made several up-river journeys, happened to be moored for the night alongside the bank, which, owing to the great westward bend of the Nile, had changed from the east to the south side of the river about an hour before sunset. Being kept awake during the night by myriads of insects—coming mostly from the palm-thatch roof and dirty woodwork—I was outside the



AN UNUSUAL FORM OF SHILLUK HAIR-DRESSING.

The background shows the type of country, the greatest equatorial swamp in the known world.



little midship awning when the first pale lemon streaks of a new day appeared over the tiger-grass on the low river-bank. When the light increased I noticed the heads, shoulders and spears of a large number of Shilluks above the thick undergrowth on the north side. By rousing Abdul, who had kept watch during the early part of the night, as well as the four native boatmen, I was able to cross the river and observe this savage hunt. The shore at this point was broken by a large, swampy *khör*, with gently sloping banks covered by tall grass. Closer inspection, with the aid of binoculars, revealed lanes through the rank undergrowth made by hippopotami when moving to and from their grassy beds every night and morning.

It was one of those places for which the big game hunter is ever on the lookout, and I knew at once that the Shilluks, who had now completely disappeared, were posted along one or other of these tracks leading to the water's edge. By cautiously moving the boat, in which I had decided to remain, it was possible to obtain an uninterrupted view of what seemed to be the most likely spot from which the hippos would emerge from the grass jungle. These amphibious beasts are the most unsuspecting of big game, for although they had, no doubt, paid toll in a similar way to innumerable parties of native hunters in the past at exactly the same spot, they would continue to use it indefinitely. After waiting for nearly an hour the first ungainly beast waddled out of the opening and floundered into the river. Then came a chorus

of high-pitched yells, followed almost instantly by a peculiar snort, and a big bull hippopotamus lurched on to the bank and into the water.

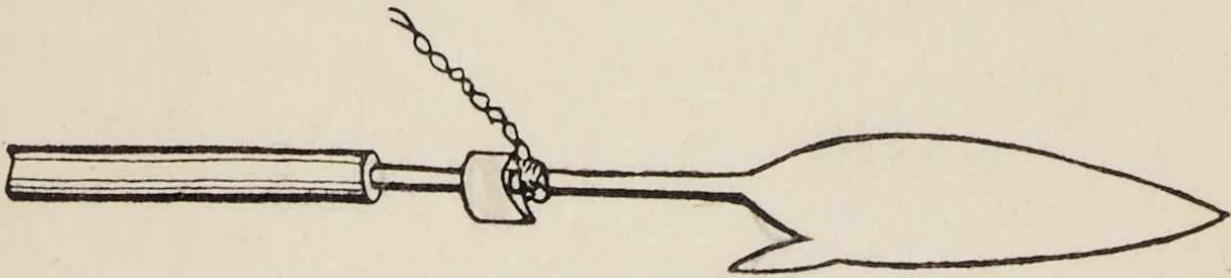
The river-edge became thick with shouting, dancing savages. Canoes, until now completely hidden among the swamp-grass, were hastily paddled into mid-stream. For some reason the first hippopotamus had been allowed to reach the river in safety. Possibly it was considered too small for the purpose of supplying the entire village with the meat for a feast, or else eluded its assailants by moving through the untrodden grass. However this may be, the second, a much larger animal, received the barbed harpoon full into its side, at a point where the pinkish belly meets the mud-brown back. The shape of these harpoons will be seen in the illustration. Attached to the hilt is a grass rope and a float of *ambach* faggots. The fibre used for making the rope is the *hibiscus cannabinus*, or Deccan hemp of commerce, a weedy shrub growing to about 14 feet in height which thrives in the swamps of Central Africa. Wherever the stricken beast swam, after reaching the water, he was betrayed by his tell-tale float being towed along the surface.

The canoes were now in full cry, and every now and again, when the hippo came near the surface, there was a momentary glint of steel in the early morning sunlight as the Shilluk hunters drove deep their broad-bladed spears into the immense back. Once, however, a too-venturesome craft was tossed high out of the water by the hippo rising suddenly to the surface



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directly underneath, and its three occupants were thrown into the reptile-infested waters. These men splashed lustily as they swam for the bank, but in the turmoil which followed I could not be sure whether all or only two reached dry land in safety. In their eagerness to secure the huge prize another canoe was paddled swiftly towards the severely wounded and infuriated beast, which was now completely surrounded by yelling savages. At one moment it looked



SHILLUK HIPPOPOTAMUS HARPOON

The blade is of beaten iron with a curiously shaped barb. The shaft is of hard wood and the stopper below the knotted grass rope is a wooden ring. The whole weapon is from 4 ft. to 5 ft. in length.

as if nothing could save this second canoe and its occupants from being literally crunched between the immense open jaws, but a dexterous twist of the paddles saved the situation but overturned the craft.

Whether the splashing and shouting had frightened away the crocodiles, usually to be seen sunning themselves on every available mud-bank, or whether these natives, who have a curious religious respect for this most repulsive reptile, were unusually lucky cannot be told, but it certainly seemed remarkable that of the six men thrown into the river by the capsizing of the two canoes all appeared to reach the bank in safety.

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In contrast to this, however, is the huge mortality caused by crocodiles among individual hunters throughout Equatorial Africa, a fact which lends colour to the belief that the seemingly senseless shouting and splashing of parties of natives when engaged in a river chase is not entirely due to unrestrained savagery.

Some thirty minutes sufficed to complete the work, and a ton and a half of meat was hauled up, by a yelling horde, on to a narrow, sandy spit of the north bank. Evidently it was not the intention to begin a feast at once, because no fires were lighted. After a few minutes of shouting and indescribable excitement the huge bulk was pulled, by grass ropes, clear of the water, and the ring of completely naked savages, now increased in number to nearly a hundred, commenced hacking and hewing great strips of reeking flesh from the carcass. Small pieces were bolted while raw and still warm. The longer strips, carved with wonderful dexterity by the spear blade, were slung on long poles and carried away inland by a seemingly endless stream of men, women and children. It is a curious fact that this method of hunting the hippopotamus, devised by savages in the dim past, formed the basis of a more scientific application of the same principles employed by the British Navy when hunting German submarines during the Great European War of 1914-18.

The Shilluks generally make a pretence of cooking hippopotamus meat before eating it, but it is, nevertheless, often devoured completely raw by the hunters themselves and less than half-cooked during their



dances and feasts. After a hunt of this character the village to which the spoil belongs soon becomes a veritable shambles of blood and semi-putrid meat. Long strips festoon all the trees in the neighbourhood, as well as poles especially prepared for drying the meat in the sun. With the reek of blood in the air it is no unusual thing for a hungry lion or leopard to pay the village a nocturnal visit. The Shilluk youth who wishes to earn the right to wear either an ivory amulet or a necklace of claws for killing one of these beasts single-handed with a spear is usually to be found waiting in ambush along one of the paths leading from the grass-jungle to the tempting bait. These savages are adepts in the art of making big game traps with bent wood and fish-gut. They also construct pitfalls for *oribi*, *tiang* and reedbuck.

From this it must not be thought that the Shilluk is a scientific hunter. Constructed by nature for the chase, with immensely tall body, long limbs and a muscular frame, these natives carry on a never-ending and almost superman type of warfare against the beasts of the African wilds. They run down such fleet and powerful animals as the *oribi*, *tiang*, reedbuck, hartebeest, roan, cob, elephant and giraffe, killing them as they run with a thrust of the long and heavy spear. Elephants are brought down by a daring hunter getting sufficiently close to cut the hamstrings of this huge beast. Duels with lions and leopards are of such frequent occurrence that almost every Shilluk possesses one or more of these skins,

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especially of the latter beast, for wear during tribal dances, and it must be remembered that they have no firearms of any kind.

There is one animal which not only the Shilluks but also the Dinkas, Nuers, Baris, Anyuaks and countless other tribes of the vast interior will not attack. This is the African buffalo, called *Gamus* on the White Nile and *Mekura* by the Bari tribes in the interior. While travelling with a party of Northern Dinkas, near Melut, we came suddenly upon an immense herd of these fearsome-looking beasts in the tall grass of a clearing. My native companions then explained that so thick is the hide of these beasts that even the sharp-bladed spears will not easily penetrate it, but this is encroaching on the territory to be covered in a future chapter.

After passing the mouth of the Sobat, which is a fine stream, with high banks, rising about a thousand miles to the eastward, in the highlands of Abyssinia, the main river winds considerably, and has an almost lake-like appearance as it flows placidly between low, swampy banks covered with thick, rank grass and mimosa scrub. Later on the stream narrows again, and grass-covered plains, dotted here and there with isolated trees, extend away on both banks as far as the eye can see. A curious feature of the otherwise flat landscape is the large number of immense ant-hills which can be seen rising like dark cones against the sea of rank grass. These have the appearance of being pigmy dwellings, but so dreary is this waste that even the villages of the Jange Dinkas are usually far inland.



About 35 miles beyond the mouth of the Sobat the White Nile is joined by its second great branch, the Bahr-el-Zeraf, and from here the main stream runs through low-lying country with scarcely a tree in sight. On the north bank of the river is the bare plain, called *Fawa*, which is intersected by a number of watercourses. These become vast swamps during the rainy season.

What the scenery along this extreme southern frontier of Kordofan, with the wild Ghazal stretching away on the opposite river-bank, lacks in scenic attractiveness it more than makes up in the variety and interest afforded by its big game. Hippopotami become very numerous, and, on the south bank, the heads and raised trunks of elephants are frequently seen above the tall grass. Had I possessed to the full both the instincts and skill of the big game hunter it is here that my water caravan would have rested, at least for a time. The spoor of lion was seen during several inland excursions, and once, in the early morning, the spotted yellow and black head of a leopard showed momentarily between the grass on the opposite side of a watercourse. Occasionally the long necks and small heads of the giraffe and the far more rare heads and antlers of Gray's waterbuck were seen through glasses, some miles inland. However, one cannot serve two masters, especially in a region almost as large as Europe, and in these wild lands big game hunting is a serious business not easily combined with exploration and investigation among native tribes.

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About the little village of Tonga nothing need be said here, for beyond being the landing-place and starting-point for the hundred-mile march to Talodi, in the Southern Dar Nuba, it has little to recommend it except a few native *tukls* and a small Government post. About 50 miles above the confluence of the Bahr-el-Zeraf the White Nile finally loses its reputation as a river, its identity as a separate stream and its geographical name. At this point the swamp-encompassed Lake No is entered.

It would seem that the name and description of this sheet of water could usefully be reversed, for it is certainly *no* lake, but is a vast shallow morass, out of which flows the Bahr-el-Ghazal and the Bahr-el-Jebel. The first of these two equatorial river roads is about 120 feet broad and only 8 feet deep at its mouth during high-river season, and is navigable for about 153 miles further south to a delectable spot called Meshra-el-Rek, amid wonderful semi-explored swamps and some fine big game country. The Bahr-el-Jebel, which is reached by turning abruptly to the south directly Lake No is entered, is the real continuation of the great Nile system. Of course our school atlases still continue to call it the Nile, in the same way as they make the Marañon into the Amazon, because, like hundreds of other rivers, it happens to join the latter stream ; but, no doubt, this is because they do not like to be pedantic on these small points, and it is a fact that the Bahr-el-Jebel winds away southwards from Lake No for hundreds of miles to the Ripon



Falls and Victoria Nyanza. The mouth of this great river gives no indication of its future, for when it leaves Lake No it has the appearance of a winding canal, cut through banks of tall papyrus with *um sūf* on its oil-like surface.

All around is the great Sudd, which extends for hundreds of miles south, east and west, for ever steaming under an equatorial sun, so that this great river loses by evaporation and in other ways more than a third of the total volume of water received as its birthright from distant Victoria Nyanza. On the borders and among the labyrinths of this great morass there are isolated tribes who have retreated into this pestiferous wilderness after their first contact with the white man or the Arab. Many of its secrets have yet to be solved. Stories are told of weird native societies, cannibal orgies and huge water snakes, but of these more will be said in those pages set apart for the secrets of the great swamp.

## CHAPTER IX

### The Blood-drinking Dinkas

SO split up by successive waves of invasion and retreat are the native races of this part of Africa that any attempt to sort them into countries or arrange so that one's route through these wild and little-known lands forms an orderly procession from the territory of one savage tribe to that of another is foredoomed to failure. An example of this is afforded by the Dinkas, a large and powerful tribe who were once the Zulus of the Upper Nile, but who have since become so disunited by wars, slave raids and internal feuds, that at the present time they are to be found in places as wide apart as the Fawa country, to the north of Lake No, in the south of the Sudd, around Shambé, and on the east bank of the White Nile between Renk and Kodok.

This wide territorial division is the direct result of savage warfare, but there have been other disrupting influences, such as tribal jealousies and feuds, which have caused these stalwart savages not only to leave their original habitat, but also to live in small villages, sometimes composed of only a few *tukls*, with hundreds of such semi-divided communities, acknowledging numberless petty chiefs, spread over thousands of



square miles of broken country, often extremely difficult of access. During my journey down the White Nile it often happened that the Dinkas occupied the east bank while the Shilluks inhabited the west side. Rather than confuse the description of these two races in past chapters I determined to keep them apart and deal with the Dinkas collectively in the following pages. So, without actually retracing our steps for several hundred miles from Lake No, to which a return will be necessary later, for a study of the fierce Nuer and other equally as savage tribes who have not yet learned to wear even the single-piece garment of the Shilluks, we will pause at this point in my southward journey so as to afford an opportunity of dealing adequately with what had already been discovered during a sojourn of some weeks among the Northern Dinkas.

While journeying between Renk and Melut I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. C. B. Tracey, one of the Government Commissioners in the Dinka country, who very kindly supplied me with some excellent material, including a brief account of what he had learned of the past history of these tribes. Some such survey is necessary here to enable the reader to understand why this fighting black race reached its present northern limits. The invasion of the Dinkas into the Arab country occurred in the last years of the Arab domination of the Central Sudan, before the arrival of the Turks with modern weapons of warfare. A similar invasion of Shilluks up the west bank of the

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White Nile took place during the same period. Tradition among the Dinkas points to the fact that they were compelled to migrate from the swamps of the Bahr-el-Jebel because there was neither sufficient solid land nor food for them all in these frequently inundated regions. In view of what can be learned of the history of other Nilotic tribes, such as the Nuers, Anyuaks and Shilluks, it seems probable that there was a great movement among these people at the close of the eighteenth century, which would have resulted in further northern encroachments into the Arab country if it had not synchronized with the arrival of firearms into this part of Africa. The pressure was, however, subsequently eased by the decimation of the black races along the disturbed frontier by the incursions of the slave raiders.

So far as can be learned the Northern Dinkas crossed the Sobat River and invaded the south-western borders of the declining Fung Empire about 1775. There can be no doubt that the Dinkas were a fighting nation, for it is said that nothing stopped their spears until they met the bullets of mechanical warfare. There seems to be a great deal of truth in this assertion, for, in 1775, they crossed the Sobat and swept northwards, overcoming in a great battle near Melut the Fung Cavalry, who were then clad, like the warriors of western Kordofan to-day, in chain-mail armour enveloping both man and horse. The Dinkas, under their redoubtable leader, Akwai Chakab, penetrated for over 300 miles north of the Sobat, as far as Aba



Island, from which the wave of the Dervish invasion rolled northwards, again, until stopped by modern rifle and machine-gun fire a century later. The chief fighting clan were the Abialang Dinkas. Many of their descendants to-day stand  $6\frac{1}{2}$  feet high, and, in addition to being abnormally tall are characterized by protruding teeth. The bullets which overthrew the Fung Empire, with its headquarters in Sennar, also forced the Dinka invaders back as far as Renk, where they held out during the cruel rule of the Mahdi and Khalifa. From time to time they have been subject to the most pitiless slave raiding, and it is said that in one wholesale drive over 20,000 men, women and children were carried away into the trackless deserts of the north.

After my stay among the Shilluks I crossed the White Nile north of Melut, and made my way inland to the Dinka *billets*, or villages, then to their *feriks*, which are really temporary camps in the neighbourhood of good pasture ground, and finally into their *marabas*, or immense cattle zeribas, wherein the young men spend most of their days and nights tending and singing to their sacred bulls and sleeping in the pens on cow-dung ash. From this it will be seen that the Dinkas are a curious pastoral people, with their interests almost entirely centred on the maintenance and protection of their herds, varied at times by a raid or a hunt, and rendered mysterious by a system of totemic clanships.

The Dinka *belad*, or country, is a vast plain, lying to



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the east of the great river, between the 9th and 12th parallels of North Latitude. It is dominated for many miles by a single hill, Jebel Ahmed Agha, situated some 45 miles north of Melut. Near the White Nile this plain is covered with clumps of thick tropical forest, intersected, in places, by large swamps and *khors*. When this narrow timber belt has been penetrated, stretching away to the horizon are the open, grassy plains inhabited by the northern section of this powerful tribe. I found this country extremely difficult to traverse, even during the *Saif*, or dry season, owing to the numerous marshes and thick grass jungles which fringe the river, and the tropical forests which have then to be penetrated before the prairie region beyond can be reached. There was also considerable doubt as to the exact position of any of these inland villages, because they were not marked on any of the maps with which I was supplied, and cannot be seen from the river owing to the intervening line of forest. Moreover, they are often found to be temporarily deserted even when finally discovered. All except the aged and the sick had trekked inland with their cattle to some encampment which it would be impossible to find from the vague directions given by the very old, the leprous or the semi-insane. However, I was fortunate in finding the first *billet* at a distance of 7 miles inland from the river, and, owing to the fact that it was the dry season, the *marahas* had been established on the banks of a neighbouring *khor*, where the cattle could obtain water, which, after





AN AMBACH RAFT. A Shilluk moving camp with the aid of a raft of ambach branches.

A GRAIN-BOAT ON THE BLUE NILE. These curious craft are made of stalks and are rendered water-tight with mud.

percolating through a few miles of swamp, settled in this depression in the form of a stagnant pool.

This village appeared to shelter about twenty families. Here it should be stated that the Northern Dinkas are less prone to quarrel than those of the same tribal origin living in the sudd, and are therefore able to exist, without an undue number of murders, in somewhat larger villages than are usual in either the swamp or the Lake Abiad region of the Fawa. The *tukls* were of the usual mud and straw variety, but unlike those of the Shilluks they were dirty and ill-kept. The Dinkas go about entirely naked while in their own village, but sometimes wear a cloth robe from the shoulders to the knee when visiting other districts. The exception to this rule are married women, because it is part of the marriage custom for the bridegroom to give the bride two goat skins as a covering. One of these is cut either square or in a point and is worn in front, suspended from a belt round the waist, and the other is similarly shaped and hangs down the back of the leg.

Young people of both sexes wear only beads and other ornaments, although occasionally one sees a kind of very short apron worn by older girls. A symbol of wealth among the men is the number and size of their bead necklaces, which, however, are usually exchanged for cattle later on in life. The Dinka youth also wears several tight bands of beads round the head, which is shaven on both sides, and the hair is curled in the



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centre into a number of small red rolls. The colouring matter is obtained when one of the numerous grass fires passes over an ant-hill. The heat turns the surface of blackish grey clay into a red powder. The hair is curled with the aid of grass and is covered, together with the whole body, with a mixture made of cow's urine, sheep's droppings, the ashes of burnt cow-dung and the powdered red clay. The red clay is, however, used only on the hair. From this it will be apparent that the Dinkas carry the repulsive method of hair-dressing to an even greater extreme than the Shilluks. Not content with working the foul mixture into their hair they cover their entire body with a thin film of it. It is impossible to describe either the appearance of one of these savages or the atmosphere in the near vicinity when their morning toilet has just been completed.

During one of their tribal dances, which are poor affairs compared with those of their neighbours, the Shilluks, horse-tail helmets are worn by the men, as well as string upon string of white, blue and green beads—the latter colour not being considered unlucky by the Dinkas. A necklace of animals' teeth, another of giraffe hair, from which a chain is often suspended, amulets of either sheep or goats' tails, worn on the shoulders, a band of beads on each arm, and some twenty or thirty iron wire rings encircling the wrists form just a few of the ornaments worn by a wealthy young Dinka on feast days and holidays. Occasionally one sees the *afjok*, or ivory bangle, which here signifies





DINKA WOMEN WHO LEAD THE DANCES. They are wearing Roan crests around their heads. When photographed they were all drunk from Merissa.

DINKA BOYS IN DANCE DRESS. The bead necklaces are a sign of wealth, usually discarded after marriage.

A DINKA VILLAGE AND FOOD STORE. About 300 miles south of Khartoum.



that the wearer has killed at least one elephant with his spear.

About the dress of the women very little can be said, for beyond the marriage apron it is almost non-existent. In each village there are a number of women who lead the dancing, and, in addition to a *tob*, or cloth garment worn from the shoulder, they usually adorn themselves with a circular headdress of roan-crests. The young girls on these occasions frequently adopt sheep-skin skirts and ostrich feather belts, as well as festoons of beads, bangles and charms. A sign of mourning, among both men and women, is the wearing of a rough grass rope round the waist.

The weapons of the Dinka include the usual long and short spears, clubs and shields. The latter are made of crocodile, hippopotamus, elephant or buffalo hide. In one respect only does the armoury of the Dinka differ from that of the Shilluk. He uses, for fishing, a javelin attached to the arm by a long string. When the bubbles of a large fish are seen on the surface this sharp little saw-edged weapon is thrown with wonderful dexterity and force. The impaled fish is hauled out of the water by the attached thin but strong line. Among the more unique customs of this tribe are those pertaining to birth, marriage and death. Before confinement a woman is imprisoned in her hut, and a rope is placed completely round as a symbol of isolation. Anyone crossing this magic circle is held responsible not only for the illness or death of the mother but also for that of the child. The wealth of

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a man is based not only upon the number of cattle and bead necklaces which he owns, but also upon the number of his daughters who have reached the age of fourteen years, these latter being saleable for 30 or 40 head of cattle, according to their dusky beauty.

There are, however, complications attaching to this custom of purchasing brides. A woman being herself saleable property cannot inherit anything. Unlike the Shilluk custom of compelling girls to confess their past love affairs upon marriage, the Dinkas have a less romantic but even more mercenary custom. When a suitor has given his prospective father or brother-in-law a certain number of the cattle demanded for the purchase of the daughter, he is forthwith allowed to have intercourse with her, and no further payment need be made until the birth of the first child, when the remainder of the purchase price has to be immediately forthcoming. Here we have further intricacies, because, according to Dinka law, a man can divorce a sterile woman after accusing her publicly before the elders of the tribe. Should it then be discovered that the accusation is correct, the temporary husband can not only refuse to pay the remainder of the bride-price, but he can also demand the return of the first instalment of cattle. The girl then becomes free to marry again, but if it happens that a second husband successfully accuses her of sterility no cattle can be demanded by the relations for a third marriage. If there should be children by this last union they do not



belong to the husband, but are the sole property of the wife and can, consequently, be sold by her.

A curious case, which is, perhaps, worth recording here, came before the elders of a Niel Dinka village while I was in their country. An old man purchased a young wife and was apparently unable to fulfil his duties as a husband. The question before the "court" was the appointment of a substitute. According to Dinka law the aged husband possessed the right to appoint his son by a former wife, but desired instead to nominate a brother almost as old as himself. This was unsuccessfully opposed by the girl. After making enquiries I discovered that a son appointed in this way is known as a "Cattle-son." The obscure meaning of this appellation is that a wife has the right to claim her freedom from a man rendered sterile by age unless she, herself, is in a like condition, or the husband is willing to provide a substitute, and so prevent the loss of his wife and the forfeiture of the cattle he paid for her.

In the life of this curious tribe women are of secondary importance to cattle. This is not entirely due to the fact that the former can be purchased with the latter, because all the Dinka songs are about bulls, whom they regard as sacred. To such an extent are these domestic animals venerated that, when not out hunting, the male Dinka lives in the *maraba*, or cattle zeriba. He sings to his bulls, praising their manifold virtues and their brute strength; he dances before them so that they may be pleased and not grow lazy

or sterile ; he tends them when sick, in fear that they may die ; he twists their horns into fantastic shapes while they are young so that to him, as well as to the cows, they may appear beautiful ; and he sleeps in the pen with them at night not only to guard them, but because it is the club-house of the young men of the tribe. He uses their excrement for his toilet, partly, it must be admitted, to keep away mosquitoes, but nevertheless largely because, living with them, he knows no feelings of repulsion.

A rich Dinka may own 500 to 1000 head of cattle but seldom trades any of them, except a few old cows, for the small necessaries of an utterly savage life. The only drain upon his herds are the attacks of lion and leopard. To guard against these, elaborate zeribas of thorn bush are often built enclosing many acres, and the labour involved will be better realized when it is pointed out that the *marabas* have to be frequently moved for any distance up to 20 or 30 miles, because the tropical rains and river-floods convert areas into vast swamps, while during other months of the year a fierce sun and drought render inland pastures arid and waterless wastes.

The veneration of the bull is not entirely altruistic, as I discovered on my fifth day among these people. The food of the Dinka consists very largely of milk, and the bean of a plant called *kordala*. These seeds are ground up and soaked in milk. Dhurra is also eaten in the same way, especially in conjunction with fish and gazelle meat. To facilitate getting these



sticky messes into the mouth, four of the front teeth of the male Dinka are often removed during childhood by the simple but painful process of tearing them out with a fish spear. These and other similar cruelties are included in the sacred rites of totemism and child-initiation, subjects which demand separate treatment here. There is, however, another staple food for which we have again to look to the cattle-pen.

While in the zeriba one morning I noticed a number of young men hobbling the legs of a huge bull and curiosity drew me close to the scene of operations. When the beast had been rendered incapable of mischief the point of a short spear was suddenly plunged into a vein in the neck of the beast. Thick, red blood spurted from the wound. Bowls were filled with the reeking liquid and finally a tourniquet, which I had not hitherto noticed among the rolls of fat on the animal's neck, was tightened. The wound was then thickly smeared with a mixture of dung and wet clay and the bull was left tied up so that the hot sun quickly dried the plaster and congealed the oozing blood beneath.

When this essential work had been completed these naked savages smilingly offered me a bowl of blood to drink, but detecting my ill-concealed look of horror one of them raised it to his lips, and after drinking a quantity of the repulsive contents passed it on to another. Whether it was the hot sun or the disgusting sight of blood trickling down the corners of the mouths of these human vampires I cannot say, but a

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feeling of nausea and giddiness caused me not only to seek the seclusion of the zeriba fence, but also to forego my breakfast.

Curiously that same afternoon, while I was endeavouring to extract information on totemism, by means of signs and a written dictionary of Dinka words, from a circle including most of the elders of the village, I was again the recipient of a well-meant but repugnant gift. This was a draw at the long stem of a Dinka pipe, in the bowl of which was tightly packed nearly a quarter of a pound of native-grown, black tobacco. The pipe had already passed round the circle of mouths several times!

That night there was a cool wind blowing from the north, and, after a horrible dream, I woke up shivering, momentarily unable to rid myself of the thought that I was the victim of an experiment by these blood-drinking people of the wilds.



## CHAPTER X

### Weird Totem Rites

**A**MONG savages the novelty of having a white man in their midst wears off very rapidly, and in its place comes sullen indifference; hence it is decidedly dangerous for the traveller to outstay his welcome in the bosom of a primitive people. Seeing that this stage had been reached I returned to the river, moved some 10 miles to the south and established myself in a *billet* of the Ageir Dinkas, near Melut. With the aid of a native interpreter and the usual palaver with the chief and elders of the tribe, friendly relations soon followed and I became free to explore, as far as later happenings permitted, the mysteries of age-grade initiation and totemism.

The tribal marks of all the Northern Dinkas are dotted cuts across the forehead. Thinking this subject might lead to some reference or fact regarding the more secret rites and customs, I persevered until it became apparent that totemic clanships have nothing whatever to do with the ordinary tribal subdivisions. My next line of enquiry, although equally barren of results in this particular field, yielded some interesting facts regarding the occupations of the Dinkas. On

entering a village there are few signs of any form of craftsmanship, but a little investigation reveals the fact that these somewhat sullen savages, in spite of their many repulsive customs, are not of such a low type as might at first be supposed. It came as a surprise to find that in addition to the trades of thatching and the making of grass rope, tom-toms, earthenware, baskets, shields and spears, there are the professions—although one cannot call them learned—of medicine, surgery, massage and dentistry, as well as specialists in animal castration.

The drugs employed by the native physician are sometimes very effective in the treatment of the diseases to which these usually fine specimens of humanity are prone. They are mostly derived from roots and herbs. In the native pharmacopœia there are, however, many charms, such as those to ward off the evil eye, to prevent sterility, and to cure snake-bite. These perfectly useless potions form some of the staple sources of income for the witch-doctors, who live in small huts, usually on the outskirts of the village, and generally demand cattle in return for their services. Massage is employed for almost every ailment, and in one case which came under my notice it seemed the most efficacious remedy, albeit a very rough one, for the curious form of intestinal colic to which these natives seem exceptionally prone. Wounds and boils are made to suppurate by suction at the end of a curved, hollow horn which is placed over them. That dentistry is not a very fine art among the Dinkas



will be apparent from the fact that a barbed fish spear is used to dig the teeth out of the gums!

Women's work among the Dinkas consists very largely, in addition to looking after the cooking, the *tukl* and the children, of making earthenware pots, decorating gourds, and plaiting straw cradles and baskets. Some of these *reikas*, or cradles, are quite well made, but the earthenware, gourds and baskets do not come up to the standard of those made by the Arabs of Eastern Kordofan. Bead necklace making is also a profession which is represented in almost every large village, but as this requires the outlay of cattle or other native produce in order to obtain the beads from the few Arab traders who penetrate into these regions, it is often the occupation of the daughter of a chief.

It appears that when children reach the age of twelve years they are initiated by several barbarous customs into certain tribal rites. One of these is the extraction of four of the centre teeth in the lower jaw with a fish spear. I was told that this is to enable food to be scooped up on the finger and easily placed in the mouth, but another explanation, given to me in the Bahr-el-Ghazal region by a Syrian doctor, is that it enables the Dinka language—a kind of hissing whisper—to be more easily spoken. My own opinion is that the former is partially correct, but that it was intended to convey, in the meagre vocabulary at their command, that the custom was to simplify feeding in case of lock-jaw, a condition to which all savages seem exceptionally

liable. However this may be, the custom is a cruel one, as was proved by the lacerated and festering gums of several small boys in this Ageir village.

The entry of each child into the many age-grades which exist between the period of initiation and full manhood is accompanied by similar rites. One of these is the usual slitting of the skin of the forehead in several places to form the tribal marks. With the future mothers of this race child-birth, in later years, is made easy and almost painless by a system of stretching the parts and muscles of the body indicated. The final ceremony among male children, whereby they pass from the age-grades of youth to the totemic clanships of manhood, is a kind of trial by ordeal, in which wild animals and reptiles are employed. Whether the killing of one or more beast of the forest is demanded it is impossible for me to say.

At every place visited in the Dinka country I tried to learn more of this curious and practical system of savage education, without, however, any very appreciable success. There are certain customs among primitive peoples into which it is extremely dangerous to probe too deeply, as I was forcibly reminded some three days later in the same village. The basis of totemism appears to be an inherent and mutual fear of the animal represented by the totem. Throughout the whole Dinka tribe there are to be found a great variety of clans, each of which is represented, or symbolized, by some animal or reptile, such as the Spitting Viper Clan, the Warral Clan, the Lizard



Clan. These organizations do not coincide in any way with the different divisions of this large and widely scattered tribe.

In this village, which was made up entirely of the Ageir section of the Dinka family, there were, so far as I could learn, a number of adherents of the Spitting Viper totem, who worship this reptile partly through fear of it, and also because its action of spitting symbolizes rain. There were, also, members of other clans, and it would therefore seem that although territorial or tribal divisions play no part in the totemic organization, some clans are more powerful in one locality than others. This is probably due to the presence of certain beasts and reptiles and the absence of others.

One night, after a slight shower of rain—somewhat unusual at this period of the year—my native guide asked me very mysteriously, “You go Fio totem?” Either this old villain, who was half Dinka and half Arab, did not know the secrecy which surrounds these totem rites, or else, as is more probable, he coveted my equipment and took this subtle way of getting other people to dispose of me. It was a particularly dark night, as there were very heavy clouds and there was no moon, when I left the comparative safety of the village and was piloted out towards one of the small huts occupied by the witch-doctors. After passing into the zeriba, which surrounded this isolated little *tukl*, we made our way towards a large fire, around which I could see a number of black figures.

If it had not been for a suspicious action on the part of my guide it is more than likely that I should have been blinded for life. Before we came within the circle of light the Arab fell to the rear with noticeable promptitude, and, with senses keyed for any suspicious movement, I stopped abruptly. Several times I watched the figures dance round the fire, and then I saw the old rain-maker-priest-doctor emerge from his *tukl* carrying a snake round one arm. All the figures except that of a single youth receded from the firelight, and for some seconds, during which time the *kujur* seemed to be addressing the invisible circle, the completely naked body of the savage was sharply silhouetted against the red glow.

The witch-doctor then approached the victim, and in spite of the horrible writhing of repulsion which appeared to contort his body placed the snake in a coil round an outstretched arm. It dawned on me at once that the basis of the totemic cult is the fear of a certain animal or reptile—common to the region—which may or may not have been inherited, and which is discovered during childhood by the victim's playmates. As this animal or reptile may be met at any moment of the day or night to fear it is considered a fatal weakness, only to be overcome by an ordeal of familiarity. It was this ceremony, or part of it, which I was witnessing. Apparently the viper which had been placed round the arm of the savage had, however, been rendered innocuous in some way by the witch-doctor because nothing untoward happened.



Having seen as much of the ceremony as I dared before ascertaining if my presence at one of these totemic initiations would be straining primitive friendship too far, I was about to step forward into the ring of light. Luckily my eyes were not blinded by the bright glare of the flames, as they would have been had I come straight out of the pall-like blackness around, and I noticed a long pole laying on the ground near the edge of the fire glow. Then, to my horror, I observed a snake on the ground only a yard or two from where I stopped. Looking more clearly, I saw that attached to this pole by their tails were no less than three repulsive looking vipers that appeared to be acting as guards for the mystic ceremony beyond.

For some minutes I dare not move, not knowing whether there were similar lines of reptiles around. Eventually, however, I plucked up courage to slowly back away from the circle of light, keeping as near as I could, with only the receding fire as a guide, to the path by which I had entered the unusually large compound. The rascally old Arab was waiting outside the zeriba, but unfortunately it was too dark for me to see the expression on his face when I stepped quickly through the opening in the reed fence. However, I had made up my mind to say nothing that night, while he could create mischief, but to get rid of him in the morning. It was certainly a most lucky escape, for this particular species of the cobra family spits venom in the face of anyone who approaches it, causing great

pain, and, if any of the poison gets into the eyes, the result is either temporary or permanent blindness. On the following day the Arab went downstream in a canoe towards his home near Renk, cursing the infidel who had promised him great rewards, but gave him only 50 piastres.

Not knowing what my treacherous guide had been able to shout in the Dinka tongue before I hustled him out of the village with threats of vengeance if he dared to return, I considered it prudent to leave this portion of the country for good. No difficulties were placed in my way of getting back to the river, in fact the village headman supplied me with two young men to show the best way across the intervening swamp. While approaching a narrow belt of forest, some few miles from the river-bank, I noticed a clump of trees away to the south suddenly sway in an alarming manner. For a moment I thought this was an optical illusion, due to the heat of midday, but again a whole section of forest swayed from side to side as if caught by a fierce gust of wind. My field-glasses soon revealed the cause. It was the sudden movement of thousands of small birds in unison. Some ten minutes later a whole flight took to the air above, forming a fast-moving black cloud.

In no part of the world have I seen such an enormous number of birds of different species as are to be met with along the course of the White Nile and Bahr-el-Jebel. On an island off the coast of South West Africa I once saw a mile or two of beach literally black with



birds, but they were nearly all of one species, and the same applies to the Guano Islands in the Pacific. Here, however, geese, pelican, water-fowl, greater bustards, crane, heron, ibis, guinea-fowl, flamingo, kite, partridge, pigeon, quail, shoebill, griffin, marabout, and many other varieties are seen, either singly or in thousands, feeding during the daytime among the swamps and flying overhead in a succession of cloud-waves every evening at sunset on the way to their roosting-places.

The forests in this part of the Dark Continent are not very rich in species of monkey, but I noticed a number of the *Cercopithecus æthiops*, or common white-whiskered grey Grivet monkey, and, on the opposite, or Shilluk side of the river, a little further south, one or two specimens of the Red Hussar variety. Although in the Bahr-el-Ghazal region small troops of baboons may often be seen coming down to the rivers, under the strict discipline of a hairy sergeant-major, one seldom meets these big brutes in the forests of Southern Kordofan, but the *Papio anubis* is known to exist there.

Among the carnivora which may at any moment be met with south of the 11th parallel are lions, leopards, serval cats, the caracal lynx, civets, one or two species of mongoose, striped hyenas, the black-faced honey badger, which is, however, seldom seen above ground in daylight, and a species of skunk, which, like its American prototype, gives out a foul smell when attacked. Among other game animals are Heuglin's

hartebeest, *tiang*, duiker, *oribi*, waterbuck, white-eared cob, reedbuck, roan antelope, buffalo, hippopotamus, giraffe, elephant and, occasionally, black rhinoceros. Along the edges of swamps are to be found the *Trionyx triunguis*, which is a kind of river turtle. Lizards and snakes are common, while the Dinkas frequently use semi-wild dogs for hunting purposes.



## CHAPTER XI

### Adventures in a Grass Jungle

**H**AD the country of the Dinkas been left for good, as was the intention after my experiences among the Ageir of Melut, I should have saved myself from a slight attack of dysentery and a day of anxiety, for which I was ill-prepared physically, while marching with a party of the Nok section of this great but scattered tribe in the Lake No region.

The climate of the north-eastern Ghazal is hot, damp and somewhat unhealthy, although there are, towards the end of the dry season at least, nothing like the swarms of mosquitoes one would expect from the equatorial climate and the rank vegetation around. Lake No forms the north-eastern apex of the 20,000 square miles of the unexplored sudd, or swamp, which has its base line between Wau and Shambé, and is formed by the rivers from the Nile-Congo watershed flowing into a low-lying basin, which also receives the floods of the Bahr-el-Ghazal, the Bahr-el-Arab and the Bahr-el-Jebel. It is a watery cul-de-sac, covered with papyrus, tiger-grass, reeds, *um sâf* and almost every variety of swamp-grass and water plant. Here and there are islands, capes and peninsulas of more or less

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solid earth and compressed vegetation, but the waterways are often blocked with great masses of floating weed. It is the greatest equatorial swamp so far discovered. Some idea of its size may, perhaps, be gained by comparison. It equals the land area of Scotland, is half the size of the State of New York, and has twice the area of Belgium.

Although the Bahr-el-Jebel, or Upper Nile, was cleared of sudd with great difficulty in the year 1900, and the current of this river now runs with sufficient strength to keep it comparatively free, it is unsafe for a sailing *nuggar* to proceed far into the swamp region by any lagoon or river. The name of sudd is given to a mass of papyrus and other water plants which grow in the lagoons and shallows and are often carried into the main stream by the floods. Should these huge masses become stationary, limbs reach down to the bed and take root, anchoring the floating island. Sometimes blocks of floating weed jam together in a narrow channel, entirely closing a river with a solid and almost impenetrable barrier of vegetation. Huge tightly compressed islands, of sufficient thickness to stand upon and large enough for the purposes of a camp, are encountered. In 1860 Gessi found his retreat down the Bahr-el-Ghazal barred by vast areas of sudd, and suffered great hardship before he eventually found a way out of this extraordinary labyrinth.

From a canoe, amid its awful silences, nothing is visible except the fringing wall of tall papyrus and tiger-grass. The air is hot, still and heavily charged



with moisture. The surface of the chocolate-coloured flood is mottled with *um sâf* (*P. pyramidale*). The equatorial sun blazes down mercilessly, mosquitoes breed in millions during the rainy season, but are happily not so numerous in the dry months, and over all this desolation there is the dangerous glamour of the unknown on its isolated islands and around its unexplored shores.

It was towards the western corner of Lake No, where there is a broad belt of thick grass jungle on firm land—with this great swamp stretching away, almost treeless and apparently lifeless to the south and east—that I was returning with two Dinka guides, after a brief visit to one of their inland *billets*, undertaken very largely to ascertain if any material difference existed between the western branch of this tribe and those with whom I had been sojourning on the White Nile, when we came suddenly upon a large herd of buffaloes, hidden by the tall grass.

With the aid of a native boy, picked up near Melut, I had been endeavouring to find out by what name the Dinkas called themselves—a most important item which is too often lacking in the information brought to light by travellers in remote countries. Without this key it is impossible to make comparisons when talking with members of other tribes, who seldom understand the names given to their own or neighbouring races by academic geographers. The Dinkas refer to themselves as *Jieng*, and to the Nuers, with whom I wanted to get into touch, as *Jaang*. The small

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phonetic difference between these two names had been causing me considerable difficulty, and I was pre-occupied with the final solution of the problem when we descended from a slight rise into thick, reed-like grass, reaching, in places, above the head.

Across this jungle to the water's edge ran a narrow and tortuous native path. After proceeding Indian file for about half a mile I heard, away to the left, the stamp of heavy hoofs, like a herd of cattle on the move. The Dinkas stopped and tried in vain to peer over the top of the grass. My boy turned, his eyes wide open with fear, and whispered "*Gamoos.*" This I knew to be the Arabic for buffalo. The position was an awkward one, for, while we were blinded by the tall grass, the herd, if they caught the scent, would be strategically in the best position for an attack, and these huge, shaggy animals, unlike the lion or other big game of the African jungle, do not hesitate to stalk and attack anyone who goes too near, or wounds one of them. Among natives as well as the majority of white hunters they are the most feared of all the wild beasts of this region, because to kill or wound one out of a herd, especially in thick grass, is extremely dangerous. Either the beast itself, or one of its companions, will double back along the track and wait for the approach of the hunter. Unless the latter is superlatively quick and cunning he will be gored to death in a frenzied charge of this thick-skinned beast.

To make matters worse I was carrying only a small bore Winchester which, of course, is quite useless



against such heavy and dangerous game. The Dinkas had nothing but their long, broad-bladed spears. They looked down at my rifle—from which they always expect much when in the hands of a white man—but I shook my head and endeavoured to explain that the bullets would not penetrate the enormously thick hide of the buffalo. This they seemed to understand, and for some minutes we stood still, not knowing whether a move would place us nearer or further away from the danger.

The air was so still that I could not determine in which direction it was moving, and for the omission to find this out before passing through big game country I found it difficult to forgive myself. One of the Dinkas suggested firing the grass and making our escape under cover of the flames and smoke, but, without knowing the direction of the wind, and whether or not we were actually in the centre of a widely distributed herd, which would at once stampede, this was rendered far too dangerous.

Every now and then the thunder of hoofs and curious reverberating noises came over the dry ground and through the still air. Eventually I decided that there was more danger in standing still in the vicinity of a moving herd than in going cautiously forward across what appeared to be the danger zone. After about half a mile, accomplished with every sense on the alert, but eyes unable to see beyond a few yards, the hitherto hard earth seemed to dip into a muddy *khör*, and the reed-like grass rose high above our heads. A hundred

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yards of this brought us to what was evidently the opposite bank and a considerable rise in the now dry ground.

No sooner were our eyes above the grass than we saw a line of dark brown humps away to the left, but on the same ridge as ourselves. Luckily the light air was not carrying our scent in that direction. Moving towards the still distant water, with our heads and shoulders now well above the blinding reeds, we stumbled repeatedly while searching for the tell-tale black hump denoting the back or high shoulders of a wandering member of the herd. Buffalo, when grazing or drinking, often post sentries on their flanks, and it was this possibility with which we had now to reckon. After some minutes, when all danger seemed to be passing and the track to the water, still winding through thick grass about 4 feet high, appeared to be clear, the beat of hoofs sounded afresh.

Looking round sharply we saw the whole herd of ungainly beasts stampeding in a direction which, if the run continued, would take them across our line of advance to the water. There must have been at least fifty or sixty of these huge animals, who had at last caught our scent. No useful purpose would be served by standing still, and to leave the native track for the thick grass around might easily end in our being lost in this most difficult form of jungle to traverse. When the herd came parallel I could see the massive heads and horns, as, in the crush of the stampede, one beast rose half on to the back of another.



It certainly produced a queer feeling with less than 800 yards of grass between this mass of beasts and ourselves. However, directly I saw the rear animals rise on to the haunches of those ahead the tension eased, for this meant a rapid slackening of speed by those in the forefront of the herd. Although this stampede had brought the danger much closer the herd stopped about 400 yards from the point where it would otherwise have crossed the trail to the water's edge. No longer were the beasts quiet and unsuspecting of danger. They moved about restlessly, and every now and then raised their huge heads to better sniff the air. Still we marched forward, not daring to halt for any length of time because only two hours of daylight now remained, and there were still some four miles of bad trail before we could reach the little vessel, moored alongside a steep piece of solid ground almost opposite to Khor Deleb, some two miles up the Bahr-el-Ghazal from its mouth in Lake No.

It was an anxious time when we again came abreast of the restless herd, and I was congratulating myself upon the passing of the danger when the stampede started afresh. What would have happened had these resolute beasts decided to stalk us, which is their usual crafty way of dealing with intruders, there can, of course, be no telling. Again, if they had placed themselves across the trail to the river only two courses of action on our part would have been possible, either a detour among the grass, with the consequent danger of losing our way, or else a retreat in darkness to the

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higher and more open Fawa, from which we had come, would have been unavoidable. In both cases it would undoubtedly have meant spending the night in the thick grass without a fire, tent, or even ground sheets, with all the risks from wild beasts and ague attendant upon these misfortunes.

However, this time the herd stampeded back along the track made in their former charge, and just as the rim of the westering sun—a golden orb in a truly wonderful sky—touched the line of swamp, we scrambled down the sodden bank into the shelter of the little palm-thatch cabin. Early on the following morning I proceeded upstream towards a Nuer *billet*, near a delectable spot called by the natives Bio. My two Dinka guides of the previous day, who had been regaled and allowed to sleep in the bow of the boat, would not proceed with me to the Nuer village, because they were at enmity with this naked and savage tribe. This is the more curious because there is a great similarity of language between the Dinka and the Nuer. Apparently the trouble originated in a raid made by the Nuers on the cattle and women of the Nok Dinkas, and this had not been properly avenged.

The Bahr-el-Ghazal is, in appearance, no mean stream. For the first few miles of its course the breadth is about 120 to 180 feet, and it wanders placidly along between low banks, with level plains to the north and grass, sudd and swampy flats to the south. On the surface of the water there were large



masses of *um súf*, and every now and again the banks were obscured by papyrus and reeds. Like all the villages in this region, which is subject to widespread floods, and often remains water-logged for many months in the year, the Nuer *billets* were several miles inland, and when eventually I reached one of them, after several failures due to the absence of a guide, my reception was little short of hostile. Eventually, however, perseverance triumphed, as it usually does where savage distrust is the enemy, and somewhat more cordial relations were established. From the first it was apparent that very little in the way of scientific investigation could be carried on among these low type of savages. Here it should be pointed out that the swamp region is the retreat of all the worst elements among Dinka, Nuer, Gok, Golo, Bellanda and the other tribes encircling this fetid area.

The Nuers are a tall, thin race, very similar in appearance, although physically inferior, to the Dinkas. They roam about completely naked except for a single string of beads round the waist. Married women wear a small bunch of leaves at both back and front. Here and there in the village I noticed a woman with the apron customary among the other Nilotic tribes. There did not appear to be any cohesion between one small group of *tukls*—which were poor structures compared with those of the Shilluks—and another less than two miles distant. Each had its own headman, or chief, and the only noticeable difference in the appearance of the one I visited first and his twenty or

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thirty followers was an immense ivory bangle worn round the wrist.

Some of the men wore a tight band, like a short corset, round the waist above the hips, with the remainder of their bodies bare. Others covered their lower extremities and faces with ash-dust, giving themselves a most weird and fierce appearance. They had no canoes and only a few sheep and cattle. The former animal resembled that of the Shilluk and Dinka, which is, I believe, unique, in as much as it has a shaggy appendage to the breast, neck and shoulders, resembling a mane, with very little wool on the remainder of its body.

Although the male Nuer does not dress his hair in the elaborate fashion of the Shilluk beau he cuts it short at the back, leaving the front and sides long and bushy. The Nuer girl, on the contrary, either scrapes the hair back from the sides and forehead, and then stitches it with grass, so as to form a kind of cockscomb, or else curls it, with the aid of a stick, so that it lies in tight ridges from the front to the back of the head. A few of the men had their stomachs or backs cicatrized. The slashes raise unsightly lines and dots, extending either from the shoulder to the base of the spine or across the centre of the abdominal wall, with two parallel lines running up to the breasts. The only scarification of the women appeared, from the number and similarity of design, to take the form of a tribal mark, which in this case was a series of large and small crosses on the shoulders.



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A little girl who appeared to have been recently cut in this way was plastered up with clay, but, later on, I saw a boy of about twelve years of age receiving this decoration to his birthday suit, and the slashes were made with a bone knife while the victim was held firmly on the ground. Into the half-inch cuts calcined ash was rubbed, making a horrible blood-stained mess of the front part of the body. It is a curious thing that all the time I was among the wild people of Africa I never once saw a boy or girl cry in the loud, bellowing, civilized sense. Anger, hatred and occasionally vice were at times visible, and uncontrollable temper made itself apparent fairly frequently, but there was seldom any sign of either tears or misery. There is no doubt that all these Nilotic tribes are, according to their lights, extremely kind to children, although young girls are invariably sold for cattle. I was told that a Nuer never thrashes his own child, because to do so would hurt him more than the chastisement would affect the disobedient infant, but that it is the custom to ask a friend to perform this objectionable duty—and this among a people who are but little removed from the cannibal stage.

It is a very general belief in civilized circles that the lower forms of human life are composed of a dour crowd of "miserable savages." From experience gained in the equatorial forests of South America, on the plateaux of Central America, in Central, North, East and West Africa, in the great Sahara and elsewhere, I can say emphatically that this is entirely

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wrong. The savage, while he remains in his primitive unclothed state is, taken generally, a happy and contented being. The real cause of all misery is either starvation, disease or death. There is far less of the former in African Equatoria than in the South American tropics. Never once did I come across natives eating earth as in the Amazon jungle, or being reduced to living skeletons by the entire absence of food. This is partly accounted for by the presence of large numbers of big game; and about the wholesale slaughter of which a severe warning is necessary. Disease is a very real and ever present menace in the life of the savage. Even the minor and easily curable ailments prevent the wild man from obtaining his daily food. There was seldom a reserve of anything except dhurra, maize or roots in any *tukl* which I entered.

About death a whole volume could be written without a page that would be considered morbid. If the savage believes in a Supreme Being and in an after life, then his belief is generally so strong that he no longer fears death, as is so often the case with the convert, whose old beliefs have been shattered and the new doctrine has not always had time to take its place. From this it must not be assumed that I am entirely opposed to all missionary effort, but I do most earnestly wish that more scientific forethought was put into this great work. The measure of success should not be the number converted to Christianity, the clothing of a tribe and the stopping of hunting or even tribal



fighters. A moment's thought will show the utter selfishness, even cruelty, of taking away the pillar of strength afforded by even a pagan belief in a land of sudden and awful death unless an effective substitute can be planted so deeply that no loss is felt in time of need. Although I know but little of missionary work, this much is plain, that such a substitute cannot always be successfully implanted in any but the young of the first generation of dull-brained savages.

The wearing of clothes is always a sore point, but in an atmosphere heavily charged with moisture, and a temperature ranging from 80° to over 100° F., where the heavens often pour down a flood against which, for days and sometimes weeks, there is no protection, where the only means of communication is by jungle path, river and swamp, can there be anything but disease and misery in the wearing of sodden garments? Again, hunting and fighting may be considered cruel by civilized peoples, but they form the only athletic exercise of many native tribes, without which a peculiar dejection settles over a savage community and soon has its reflex action in illness and disease. To control these outbursts is wise, and to offer a substitute, which does not bring the misery of bereavement in its train, is ideal, but to stop these manly pursuits entirely before other things in life have been rendered equal, is the height of stupidity. Later in my travels I studied the curious spiritualistic beliefs and practices of the Nubas, and was astonished at what I found tucked away, almost unknown to the

world, in these curious, isolated hills of furthest Kordofan.

This is, however, a digression. On my third night among the Nuers there was a fierce thunderstorm. The lightning, attracted by the amount of ironstone in the earth of the whole Ghazal, played in a remarkable manner, striking and setting fire to a *tukl* and killing several sheep in the close vicinity. Casualties from lightning are of frequent occurrence, especially in the south-west of this region, along the Congo frontier. Near Tembura it is reported that the earth, in places, contains 47 per cent of pure metal, which is mined and used by the natives.



## CHAPTER XII

### Among the Savage Nuers

**T**HE bloodshot eyes of the Nuers, which certainly do not enhance their appearance, are caused by living almost continuously in the smoke of dung fires. Although in the permanent villages of these warlike savages the huts, circular in shape and with conical roofs, are more or less habitable, the temporary shelters used while tending their cattle near the rivers and *khors* during the dry season consist either of a small dwelling of grass, seldom more than 6 feet high, or else a simple screen of reeds. In the shelter of these poor erections dung fires, on to which green wood and even dead grass is often piled, are lighted not only to supply a certain amount of warmth and to enable cooking to be carried on, but more especially to keep away the swarms of mosquitoes and other insects. Over these smoky fires the Nuers crowd and crouch together with their cattle. So blinding and choking are the fumes that the eyes of men, women and children soon become permanently bloodshot.

In the villages built on higher ground for residence during the wet season the huts are usually of better construction. The circular walls are made of mud and

reeds, while the roof, which is thatched in a series of ridges, is composed of dry grass and supported by branches of the *biglig* tree. Inside these semi-dark dwellings the walls are plastered with sand and are sometimes ornamented with crude drawings of cattle and sheep. It should be mentioned here that the Nuers are a very scattered tribe. By far the largest number dwell along the banks and amid the swamps of the Bahr-el-Zeraf and Sobat River, but there are also several thousands living in the great Sudd, between Hillet-el-Nuer and Shambé, and a smaller colony on the Bahr-el-Ghazal above Lake No. Although it was in this latter region that I first encountered the Nuer, during subsequent travels through the swamps of the Bahr-el-Jebel I became even more closely acquainted with these interesting savages, whom Petherick described as the most warlike, noble and courageous negro race that he met during his "Travels in Central Africa." Although I cannot quite agree with this early pioneer in placing these people on such a lofty pedestal, having seen and lived among races then unknown, it is nevertheless a fact that they are always the attacking force in tribal wars, and do not even take the trouble to stockade their villages or to unite for the purpose of defence, like the Shilluks. This is a sufficient indication of their fighting qualities and independent spirit, but they are a cruel, treacherous people who live in the utmost squalor in the remote areas of the swamp.

The canoes of the Nuer tribes inhabiting the Bahr-





NUBAS COLLECTING GRAIN. A dangerous sign because the grain is stored in the huge earthenware bowls in the labyrinth of caves before a fight.

THE FAMILY OF A NUBA CHIEF. The spotted girl is supposed to represent a leopard.

el-Jebel are about 12 or 15 feet in length and are fashioned from a log, hollowed roughly with an axe and then burnt out by red-hot charcoal. More unstable looking craft for use in waters infested with hippopotami, crocodiles and pythons it would be difficult to imagine. The Nuer of the Zeraf use *dom* palms or sycamores for their river craft, while on the Jebel the *kuk* tree is usually selected for this purpose.

One of the most important industries among this tribe, apart from fishing, hunting and the breeding of a few cattle, which together form the alpha and omega of their existence, is the making of pipes. At a village called Hillet-el-Nuer I watched one of these important articles being made. The bowl is fashioned of clay and is fitted with a reed stem, about 30 inches long, which has an immense mouthpiece made of calabash. Although tobacco is largely grown locally the smoking mixture of the Nuer is composed of the almost black leaves of the swamp variety of this plant, combined with a plentiful supply of charcoal and cow-dung. More curious than the pipe or even the smoking mixture, however, is the tobacco pouch, which consists of a piece of *ambach* wood, about 3 feet in length with a diameter of 5 inches. This is hollowed out to contain the smoking requisites, and also has a large hole about midway down to allow of it being gripped by the hand and used as a shield. The same hole is so shaped as to fit the neck of its owner, and is used as a pillow for sleeping purposes. Both men and women smoke these curious pipes, and are frequently seen



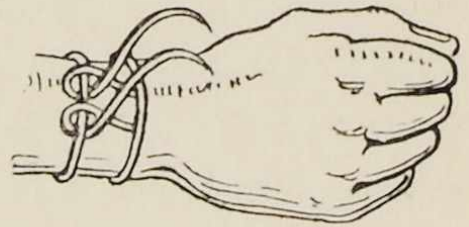
walking along supporting them with one hand while they do their work with the other.

The Nuer has several peculiarities in regard to food. Not only can he fast without apparent discomfort for several consecutive days, but when necessity compels him to eat, unlike the Dinka and Shilluk, the food is served on wooden platters, and is not eaten with the fingers, but with the aid of a small snail shell. The principal articles of diet are fish, dhurra and cows' milk; but various fruits and roots are also eaten, as well as the flesh of wild animals, including crocodiles and hippopotami. Although the Nuers, like the Dinkas, drink the blood of bulls, it is not taken in a raw state, but is first boiled. A curious feature is that all meals are eaten in classes, according to age and sex. The children of a village, or cattle *luwak*, have their meals together, but are arranged in male and female groups which are subdivided according to age. The same division takes place among adults, and the bowls of food and *merissa* apportioned to each vary according to the two primary factors. Certain foods are considered sacred to one person and not to another. The secret of this lies in the practice of totemism; the animal represented (and which is considered to be a near relative) is strictly tabooed.

Perhaps the most curious ornament worn by the Nuer is the claw-wristlet, which is made either of bone or iron wire. The two curved spikes which stand out from the back of the wrist are used either to end a friendly argument or to reprove a disobedient wife.

The cicatrization of both men and women is done by tribal artists and the method, although efficacious, is decidedly painful, if the faces of the young victims are a true indication of their feelings. Each piece of skin is tightly nipped between wooden splints and is then cut with a saw-shaped bone knife. Cold water is inserted each day into the twenty or thirty wounds forming the complete design until healing is accomplished and the scars are made permanent.

In the Ghazal region I watched a party of these savages preparing an elephant trap, and could not help marvelling at the energy expended on the mere chance that one of these huge animals would pass over the desired spot. Several square holes were dug in the swampy soil, each was about 7 or 8 feet across and 10 feet deep.



CLAW-WRISTLET

When using this weapon the wrist is bent inwards to better expose the sharp steel claws, with which the flesh of the naked opponent is torn. This horrible device is also sometimes worn by the Dinkas and Shilluks.

In the bottom of the cavity, which was smaller than the top, several sharpened stakes were embedded with their points uppermost. The whole series of pitfalls was then carefully covered with brushwood and grass. Any unfortunate animal walking over it would drop through and become impaled on the stakes. From what I could learn, however, a lion or leopard is seldom caught, but frequently destroys one or more traps by falling through and then springing back to



freedom. Cow and baby elephants, as well as giraffes, are sometimes killed in this way, but months often elapse before any animal is caught, and the rainy season fills the traps with water. As these holes then become the resort of certain varieties of water snakes casualties among the natives themselves are not unknown.

Special traps for giraffes are also employed, but these take the form of grass-rope slip-knots, into which this long-legged animal places his hoof and is then unable to escape. The Nuers hunt by burning the grass and forest for miles, and the slaughter of game of all kinds, both large and small, is so great that what is now the staple food of the people of this portion of Africa must gradually become more and more scarce, resulting in widespread famine—a spectre which has already made its appearance in certain parts of this enormous territory.

Although there are few marriage customs worth noting here, beyond the very general feast and dance, the Nuer bridegroom, unlike the Dinka, is not permitted to begin conjugal relationship with his bride until the full price has been paid for her. The initiation ceremony for the admission of boys to the age-classes does, however, include a custom which although interesting to students of the natural history of man, is certainly exceedingly cruel. When about fifteen years of age the head is shaven and the boy lies down with the back of his head in a small hole in the ground. Six horizontal incisions are then made across the fore-

head from ear to ear. The blood flows into the hole and the wounds are washed with a feather dipped in cold water. This ceremony often has a fatal termination, and all boys so operated upon are segregated in a special hut outside the village, which they leave only after several weeks when their wounds have completely healed. They then go away into the wilds, live on meat, and strenuously exercise themselves so as to become strong. When they can run down a giraffe and spear it to death unaided they are considered to have passed into manhood. On returning to the village they receive a share of the family cattle, two spears and a wife. A hut has then to be built, and in this work one man helps another. All boys initiated in the same year are considered to form a *rek*, or age-class, and must assist each other throughout life by mutual protection against an enemy, in the chase, when building a hut, and in finding the bride-price.

The Nuers recognize a Great Spirit who made the world, but they have only the most vague idea of an after life. The dead are buried without any ornament or possession, but a pipe and neck-rest are sometimes placed either in or on top of the grave. *Merissa* and butter-milk are also occasionally poured on the ground in order that the deceased may be supplied with the necessaries during his long journey to join the Great Spirit. The body of a dead chief is, however, covered with butter and laid on a piece of wood. In this case the burial takes place secretly because it is assumed that he has made enemies in life who might wreak vengeance



on the corpse. One of the most extraordinary tombs in Equatorial Africa is the Pyramid of Denkur, erected over the body of a witch-doctor and his ancestors. It is a clay mound about 62 feet high, on top of which is a spear supporting an ostrich egg and feathers. It is said by the Nuers themselves that at one time this pyramid was surrounded by immense ivory tusks.

This extraordinary replica of the pyramid-tombs of Ancient Egypt and Ethiopia is situated near the Sobat River and forms a landmark which is visible for many miles. In this connexion it should be remembered that the nearest pyramid in the Northern Sudan is over a thousand miles distant, and was built by a race whose origin is known to be entirely different from that of the Nuer. What prompted the erection of the Denkur Pyramid, and how the enormous labour involved was obtained is one of the unsolved mysteries of these wild and still unknown lands.

The Nuers worship the *Sacred Spear of Kir* (originally a Dinka object of veneration). This weapon is supposed to have fallen from the sky when the first ancestor of the Dinka tribe was born. Exactly how it came into the possession of the Nuer family and why it should be held sacred by them is yet another of those curious problems which at one minute seem to indicate a common origin between certain tribes, and at another place them as wide apart as the poles. In sympathies the Nuer is allied to the Dinka, but in language he differs widely, and frequently makes war

on the latter. Only a trained philologist who has both the time and the inclination to devote years to the study can hope to unravel the tangled skein of tribal dialects, origins and affinities. Every explorer who has made serious investigations in these regions offers a solution. Each differs in the main essentials, and I have neither the requisite linguistic knowledge nor the ability to add anything of value to what others have already said upon this complex subject. The Nuers practise totemism in a similar way to that already described when relating my experiences among the Dinkas. Here, again, I must confess, probably without sufficient scientific knowledge, that I do not agree with the general theory regarding this mysterious cult, about which there is far more constructive speculation than is warranted by the known facts.

The Nuers declare that the unexplored swamps of the Bahr-el-Zeraf, the Bahr-el-Jebel and the Sobat River are the home of huge pythons which sometimes reach 40 feet in length. So far as is definitely known no specimen of anything like this size has been brought back to civilization, although reptiles up to 20 feet long have been killed in the few places visited by explorers. Being only too well aware of the misleading stories often told by savages to white travellers, either with the object of luring them into regions where they can be easily and safely dispatched, or else with the motive of preventing their further advance, I questioned several Nuer regarding the presence of this huge reptile, and their answers, taken collectively,



certainly seemed to contain an element of truth. It may, of course, have been that such an animal existed in the dim past and that the story was handed down through the generations much in the same way as the dragon so gallantly killed by the noble St. George. It appears, however, that this awful monster is of an entirely different colour to the green and black python, specimens of which have been discovered measuring up to about 21 feet, although nothing larger than 14 feet came within my own range of vision while in Africa. The larger variety they declare to be of a brown and yellow colour and to have a horn, about 3 inches long, under the tail about 4 feet from the tip. Wherever this fearsome reptile moves about on dry land the under-spike makes a furrow, and it is by this trail that the natives detect its presence and immediately leave the neighbourhood owing to its ferocity towards man. Whether or not there is any truth in the existence of this enormous species of python (or possibly anaconda) it is impossible to say because many of the more remote areas of swamp, covering thousands of square miles, on the Arab, Zeraf, Ghazal, Jebel, Pibor and other rivers (including the great Sudd and Addar Swamp) have never yet been visited by a white man.

Before entering the Ghazal River I had been warned that a native war had broken out in the region lying to the west of Lake Ambadi, some hundred miles distant. The cause was a common one, a provocative raid by Nuers in which Dinka girls and cattle had been stolen.

It is remarkable how a local disturbance of this character affects the temper of neighbouring tribes, and a very wide area of country was in a state of unrest. It was to this, and the presence of a small expedition dispatched from Wau to stop the spread of trouble and to punish the marauding tribe, that I assigned the sullen hostility of the Nuers in this near-by area of swamp. Much concerning these low type of savages which has been given in the foregoing pages was obtained later in my travels, in regions further removed from the seat of the trouble.

This, combined with raids and reprisals between the Rizeigats, a fierce tribe of Arab extraction, and the Dinkas in the neighbourhood of the Bahr-el-Arab, rendered it impossible to penetrate further and, at the same time, carry on any useful work. My only alternative was an advance to the south and west by way of the Bahr-el-Jebel.



## CHAPTER XIII

### The Swamps of the Bahr-el-Jebel

**M**Y line of advance towards the Nile-Congo watershed, by way of the Bahr-el-Ghazal and Jur River, being effectively blocked by a native rising there was no alternative but a return to Tonga. From there it would be possible either to tranship into a Government steamer, for the long journey through the Sudd of the Upper Nile, or else give up the idea of penetrating further south and make my way on foot into the wild Nuba Mountains. Unfortunately I decided on the first of these two alternatives, and thereby lost several weeks—although the journey to the extreme limit of navigation on the White Nile proved to be one of exceptional interest and I learned much of the great equatorial region to the south which formed the Darkest Africa of Stanley, Baker, Gessi and other famous explorers of a past generation. Had I known then, what caused me such bitter disappointment when some 500 miles further south, I should not have delayed, for a single day longer than was necessary to accomplish the 100-mile march from Tonga, my journey into Dar Nuba, where I afterwards encountered one of the most extraordinary native races that it has ever been my lot to meet. However, that belongs to the future.

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The problem now resolved itself into one of how best to reach the strip of country along the frontier of the Belgian Congo and French Equatorial Africa, the nearest point of which, at Yei, was still nearly 500 miles distant, and return to the drier country of Central Kordofan before the beginning of the rainy season. Owing to the nuggar going aground several times while endeavouring to skirt the shore of Lake No, I reached Tonga only just in time to transfer my baggage and equipment to the south-bound post boat.

The change from the discomfort of the palm-thatch awning, filled with stinging, biting insects, and the five square feet of hard wood for a bed, to the comfortable cabins and excellent food on the little stern-wheeler, combined with the luxury of a drink and a bath, amply repaid me for the exertions I had been compelled to make during the past week in order to reach Tonga in time. After taking the sharp southward turn immediately on entering Lake No the steamer began the 200-mile journey through the Sudd.

The upper reaches of the Nile at this point resemble a canal cut through tall, reed-like grass. There is no solid river-bank, only an immense, horizon-wide expanse of papyrus, with the winding waterway and numerous lagoons cutting into it in many directions. Hippopotami and crocodiles are here so numerous as to be a danger to the frail *ambach* rafts of the natives. This awful tropical morass is the true home of the python, but, much to my surprise, the mosquitoes

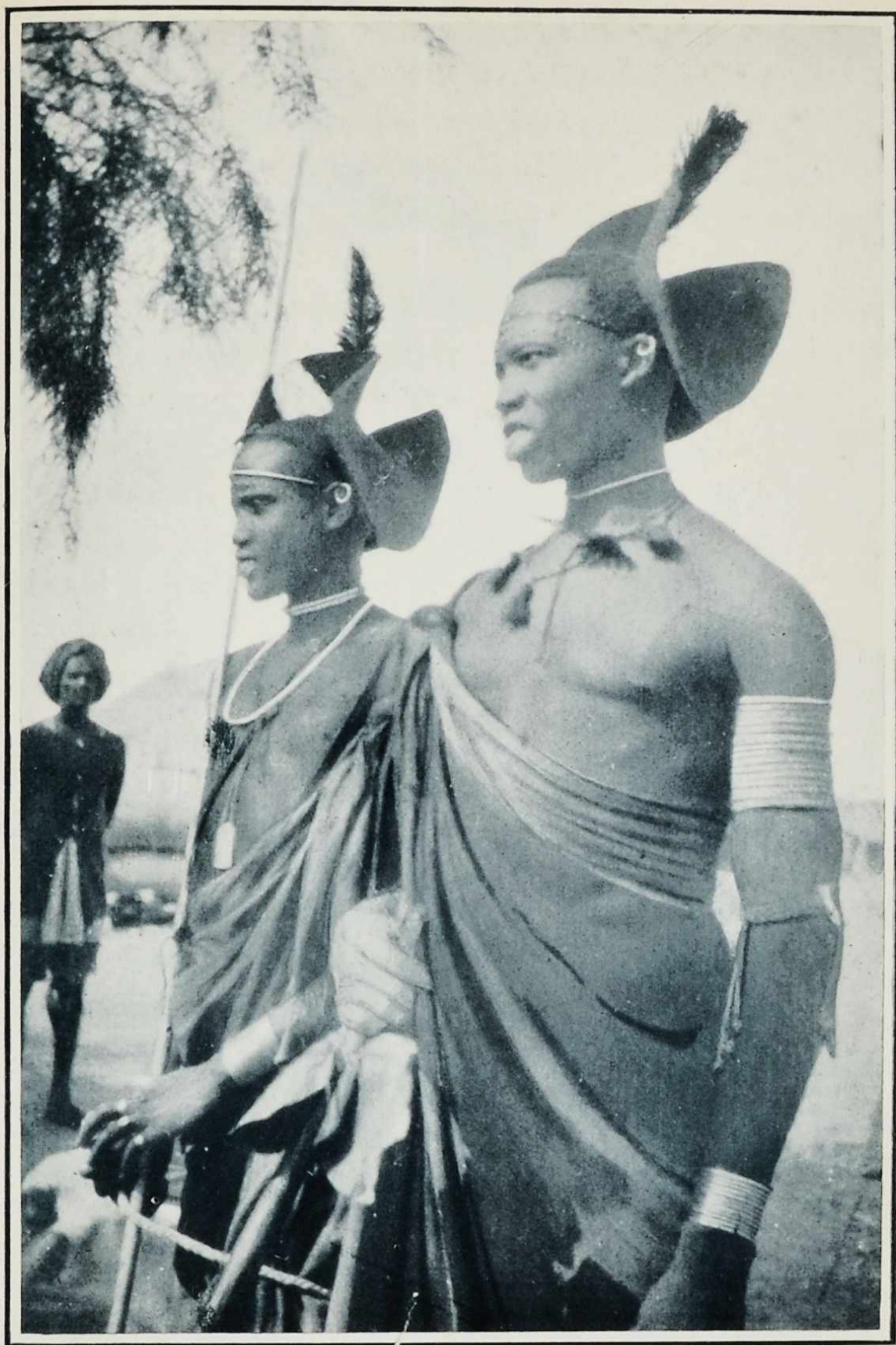


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were comparatively few compared with the millions which undoubtedly breed in this pestilential region during the rains. The *Cyperus Papyrus*, forming one of the principal constituents of the Sudd, which covers an area of many thousands of square miles, between the 6th and 10th parallels of North Latitude, is one of the best paper-making materials in the world. The great difficulty of establishing a paper-pulp industry on a sound commercial basis is the inaccessibility and inhospitable nature of this region.

My fellow-passengers were mostly big game hunters and officials returning from leave, although there were two ladies on board who seemed to thoroughly enjoy the unique experience of travelling in comparative luxury through a savage land. There was certainly much of interest and scarcely a dull hour. The equatorial sunsets were a daily pleasure, and during the soft moonlight nights, with the wilderness all around, still, weird and unfathomable, one slept on the upper deck in what became known as the "meat safe." This was a large open deck house covered only with wire-gauze as a protection against mosquitoes.

When at last the banks became more solid, near Hillet-el-Nuer, one or two scattered villages of these low type of savages were occasionally seen. A few miles further on, however, the Sudd was again encountered, and the vast desolation spread away on every side. After passing the point where the southern end of the Bahr-el-Zeraf joins the Upper Nile, Shambé was reached. Here there is a village of the Kriech



SUBSTITUTES FOR MIRRORS.

To overcome the disadvantage of having no mirrors, two heads are generally dressed alike. Each can then admire the other.



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Dinkas, which, together with a small Government Post, lies some distance up a broad lagoon. From this little place there is a route along the southern edge of the great swamp to Rumbek and Wau, which is the administrative headquarters of the Bahr-el-Ghazal region.

Along this track, towards Lau, there are several villages of the Shish tribe, who are supposed to number over 25,000, and inhabit the region between the River Lau and the Upper Nile. They are of Dinka origin, but are tractable compared with other branches of this important tribe, although raids are common between these people and the Nuers to the north and the Atwots to the south. The villages of this latter tribe are situated far beyond the Shambé Causeway, which is a narrow ridge of solid earth across an area of swamp. They stand on the drier ground to the southwest. It is no uncommon occurrence for this track leading to Rumbek to become the no-man's-land during these inter-tribal fights. The Nuers, who have built their villages along the southern edge of the swamp, were at one time continually raiding the more peaceful Shish, but the establishment of a post at Lau has somewhat checked the ardour of these savages.

Shortly after leaving Shambé firm ground and trees became visible in the distance, but the channel through the swamp still continued to twist in such a remarkable manner that nearly ten hours were occupied in reaching Kenissa, where the papyrus finally disappeared and its place was taken by tiger-grass and *um sâf*.

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Small clumps of trees now began to make their appearance and elephants were occasionally seen, although the ivory appeared to be small. Just before reaching the village of Bor, a number of Dinkas were fishing in the crocodile-infested waters from their long dug-out canoes, and these had to be paddled hastily to the bank in order to avoid being swamped by the wash from the stern-wheel of the steamer. There is often considerable loss of life among these native fishermen due to their canoes being upset by playful hippopotami.

Inland from the village of Bor there is a mighty herd of elephants, and this country is also excellent for the shooting of lion, rhinoceros, wart-hog, gazelle, eland, roan antelope, reedbuck, white-eared cob and hartebeest. The scenery along the river-bank now changed and the vegetation became more tropical in aspect. Banana and *paw-paw* trees appeared on one or two islands in mid-stream and the villages were no longer composed of poorly built Dinka *tukls*. Tall Bari negroes stood idly about near their well-built huts, giving the impression that savage life in this part of Africa is a lotus-eating existence.

Just over 1000 miles from Khartoum, after passing the important administrative post of Mongalla, Lado is reached. This little place was, in 1874, the headquarters of Emin Pasha. Later on it became the principal Belgian station of the "Lado Enclave," but since its return to the Sudan Government it has been almost deserted. From here onwards the river-banks



are high and lined with giant forest trees. Away to the south a range of mountains cut like a blue streak athwart the horizon of wild tropical jungle. Shortly after passing Gondokoro, where Sir Samuel Baker's old station stands on a raised mound and still shows signs of human occupation although long since abandoned, the little frontier post of Rejaf is reached, at a distance of 1096 miles from Khartoum and 3013 miles from the mouth of the Nile.

Here I disembarked, and, with boxes and bags in a seemingly inextricable mess around, began to make arrangements for carriers and other necessary evils preparatory to a plunge into the blue, towards Yei, Meridi and Yambio: a reconnaissance of about 180 miles along the borders of the Congo. Now came the most bitter disappointment of all, although, as matters afterwards turned out it was not so disastrous as it seemed at the time, because otherwise I could not have reached the distant Nuba Mountains, far away to the north-west, where I afterwards made some truly remarkable discoveries. The whole belt of territory from Opari, on the Uganda border, east of the Bahr-el-Jebel, to Yambio, Tembura and beyond is a sleeping sickness area, and although I could have obtained the necessary permission to traverse this prohibited region, a permit of this character is only given on the word of the explorer or hunter that he will do no more than pass quickly through the territory and not enter native villages. To have persevered in this direction would have been worse than useless.

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Not only would the carriers have been exposed to this mysterious disease, but I should have been unable to carry out even the most cursory investigation of native life and customs.

Two ways were, however, open to me, one was to proceed due south, over the Nimule road into Uganda, for although this track also crosses a sleeping sickness area the country beyond is entirely free of infection. This is known as the hunter's trail, for it leads into fine big game country with rest-houses at intervals along the cleared track. After leaving Rejaf there is a trek of 93 miles over an excellent road to Nimule and Rhino Camp, where the Albert Nyanza steamer transports the traveller to a little place called Butiaba, a distance of about 200 miles. From this point a motor service continues to Masindi Port, 75 miles. Lake Kioga is then crossed by steamer, a distance of just over 100 miles, to a place called Namasagali, where the Busoga Railway of Uganda continues to Jinja. From here, by means of a service on Victoria Nyanza and, finally, the Uganda Railway, both Nairobi and Mombassa can be reached.

From Jinja, in the ex-native Kingdom of Busoga, it is only a short canoe journey to the Ripon Falls, over which an enormous volume of water rushes from Victoria Nyanza to form the Bahr-el-Jebel, or Upper Nile. Although these falls, which I visited in pre-war years from Uganda, are of no great height the volume of water passing over them is estimated to be 11,000,000 gallons a minute. The breadth of the falls



is about 850 feet. This spot is of peculiar interest because it is the birthplace of the Nile—the life-blood of both the Sudan and Egypt. In the days of the Pharaohs, and even in the still more distant past, long before the dawn of history, this mighty Central African lake, fed by the tropical rains of an enormous area of country, poured its life-giving floods over the same falls—unchanged and unchangeable. To the explorers of last century was it left, however, to discover this cradle of one of the greatest river systems in the world. Even to-day the savages of the wild region of forest around lay votive offerings above the falls in order to propitiate the “God of the Running Water.”

It will be obvious that this highly interesting route into Uganda presented but little scope for exploration or ethnological investigation. All except a few hundred miles was known to me, and, moreover, it has recently become a highway for hunters along what is popularly but quite erroneously called the Cape to Cairo trail. When this great trans-continental railway is completed it will be found to run several hundred miles to the westward of this equatorial road in order to avoid the impassable region of the Nile Sudd. The other alternative was along an excellent road to Abba, in the Belgian Congo, but here again sleeping sickness would have barred me from anything beyond the beaten track. By returning downstream as far as Mongalla I could have taken a new equatorial trail which leads towards the southern end of Lake

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Rudolf and Kenya Colony, but the only attraction of this route, which is entirely free of sleeping sickness, is the wonderful scenery along the base of the Immatong Range and the great variety of big game.

A short reconnaissance along this route, to which there is a track from Rejaf, revealed the fact that although the native villages are stockaded against Abyssinian slave and ivory raiders the road is in such excellent condition during the dry season that it is possible for motor-cars to pass over it into Kenya. Beyond making a few short excursions into the country around Rejaf I decided to hasten back down the Bahr-el-Jebel and make my way without further loss of time into the little known Dar Nuba. While in the neighbourhood of the Nile-Congo watershed, however, I learned a great deal about this dark territory. Some of these things were so surprising and contrary to the opinion one often hears expressed that Africa has been tamed that I cannot refrain from giving them here in the form of separate chapters. It may be of interest to those contemplating big game hunting in the Bahr-el-Ghazal region to point out that the country to the north-east and north-west of Rejaf, away from the comparatively small sleeping sickness area, is one huge game preserve, with a climate, which although equatorial, cannot be considered altogether unhealthy during the dry season. From March to October, however, heavy rain falls almost daily, usually for a few hours in the afternoon, turning the whole region into a vast swamp. Mosquitoes



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exist throughout the year in most parts, and, although comparatively few are seen during the dry months, except near water, the use of quinine and the mosquito net is advisable. Cases of blackwater fever have been known, but are very rare, and dysentery is not present in anything like epidemic form.

During the dry season the shade temperature shows an average maximum of about 100° F., and a minimum of about 60° F. In the rainy months the maximum is about 89° F., and the minimum 70° F., but the humidity is very great. The country during this time becomes a swamp, and a *khor* which is scarcely noticeable during the dry season then becomes a raging torrent. All the native tracks are obliterated by the grass, which often reaches a height of from 10 to 26 feet. Although carriers can be obtained the work is really disliked by the majority of native tribes, and only in places free of the tsetse fly, which is at present a scourge throughout the southern and western regions, can any form of animal transport be employed. There are a considerable number of native huts along the principal tracks which can be used as rest-houses, but food of all kinds is difficult to obtain while on the march.

In addition to the fauna mentioned in previous pages the chimpanzee is to be seen on the forest plateau of the Niam-Niam country, to the north-west of Yambio. Further to the south-east the black and white Colobus monkey is frequently met with, and baboons, as well as Grivet and Red Hussar monkeys, are more or less

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abundant. Among reptiles there is the crocodile, the warana, or large lizard, the python, poisonous cobra and the puff-adder. The birds include vultures, eagles, hawks, owls, parrots, nightjars, woodpeckers, sun birds, cuckoos, storks, herons, ibis, and the great shoebill, or whale-headed stork, as well as guinea-fowl, francolin, bustard and several species of ducks and geese.

While I was at Rejaf a native was brought into the settlement badly mauled by a lion. It appears from the man's disconnected story that while passing through thick grass the beast sprang at him and with one blow of its paw tore away the side of his face. Only a negro could ever have survived the terrible injuries inflicted by this one blow. Fortunately the lion made off into the long grass and the native staggered into the post with the flesh of one side of his face hanging down in strips and covered in mud and congealed blood. Before I left he had so far recovered as to be sent down river for special hospital treatment.

Those natural resources of the Ghazal which are of commercial importance at the present time include ivory, timber, rubber, beeswax, millet, cotton, earth nuts, maize and *simsim*. In spite of the wholesale slaughter of elephants by the natives, estimated at no less than 3000 a year in this one region, these valuable beasts are generally considered by hunters to be holding their own in regard to numbers. The forests of the Ghazal contain a wonderful supply of timber from such giants as the *Khaya senegalensis*, a tree of



the *Meliaceæ* family, to which both mahogany and satin wood belong, and two huge trees (called *Shande* by the Jur tribes) of the *Leguminosæ* species. There is also the *Daniellia thurifera*, as well as bamboos, rattans and various species of palm. Many trees in these equatorial forests yield tannin, especially those of the *Cambretaceæ* and *Mimosæ* families. In the export of the bark or the extract there should be a great future.

The latent wealth of this region, apart from its vast agricultural possibilities, lies in the enormous herds of cattle owned by the Dinka and other tribes, principally in the eastern and central regions. Unfortunately the Dinkas have an intense dislike to parting with their cattle in exchange for anything whatsoever. Until civilization has spread into these remote regions, causing the wild tribes to desire certain manufactured articles, there is but little prospect of anything but a small bartering trade, especially as cattle cannot be reared in the western region owing to the prevalence of the tsetse fly, to which all animals, except wild game, seem to be peculiarly susceptible.

The Azande of the Zemio and Binga territories grow a kind of rough cotton which is made into native cloth. A similar product is also cultivated by the Feroge tribes of the far west. Beeswax is collected near Wau, and *simsim* is almost universally grown for the oil, which oozes out of the plant in its natural state. This oil is used as a food and also for rubbing into the body. The Azande cultivate *telebun* (*Eleusine*

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*corona*) instead of dhurra, and tobacco is also widely although not largely grown by most tribes. Manioc is cultivated in the south and maize by the people of the eastern Ghazal.

Wild rubber is very plentiful in all regions and is obtained from a landolphia called *Odilo* by the Jurs and *Ndala* by the Dinkas. At present, however, very little of the latex is collected by the natives who are quite ignorant as to the best method of tapping and preserving the trees. Among minerals so far discovered iron is undoubtedly the most plentiful. The Jurs of the central region are the chief iron-workers, but this metal is also found in considerable quantities all over the Ghazal. Near Hofrat El Nahas, in the extreme north-west of this region, on the frontier of the French Congo, copper is known to exist and is said to yield about 14 per cent of pure metal.

The native population of the Southern Bahr-el-Ghazal is composed of a large number of small tribes, all of whom are pagan, with the possible exception of a few in the extreme north-west who have become Arabicized and are consequently Moslems. The whole life of the pagan savage is influenced by the witch-doctors, who superintend the trials by ordeal and consult the auguries. An interesting, although cruel ceremony called *Bangye* often takes place. The name is derived from the tree which provides the poison. A virulent concoction from the bark is given to a chicken and if the bird lives it is considered propitious or the reverse if death is the result. It not



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infrequently happens that a person accused of a crime against tribal law or custom is found guilty or innocent in this way.

One sometimes hears the name of Niam-Niam used in connexion with natives of the Bahr-el-Ghazal. While the origin of this word is obscure there is at the present time no tribe of this name, nor is there any record of such a tribe having existed in the past. The people who inhabit the so-called Niam-Niam country are of the powerful Zande nation, among whom the Avungara are the ruling caste. The old language of these conquerors, who now all speak Zande, is unknown to any white man. It appears to be a most jealously guarded secret. In appearance the Zande (plural Azande) are of a light reddish colour and are quite distinct in features from the negro. It is thought probable that this tribe came originally from the great Congo forest.

The average height of these people, whose three Sultans rule the country between the Rivers Mungru and Sueh, does not exceed 5 feet 4 inches, but they have long bodies and short legs. They ornament themselves with cuts, and both men and women occupy the principal part of the day dressing their hair elaborately with the aid of straw. It is curious that while the Zande women wear only a bunch of green leaves in front and behind, the men partially cover their bodies with the skins of wild beasts. They are great elephant hunters and, unfortunately, slaughter these animals in a wholesale manner by

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firing the grass in a complete circle round a herd. The Azande have only quite recently settled down. Hitherto they have been conquerors, extending their dominion far and wide over this part of Africa. Their principal weapon is the spear, although the *pinga*, or throwing-knife, and a kind of bill-hook are often carried. They are still very wild and their favourite form of attack is the ambuscade, with their warriors concealed in trees along the track through the thick forest which covers a large area of their country. During their wars against other tribes they discharge arrows to which bunches of lighted grass have been attached in order to set fire to the thatched roofs of the village being attacked. These brown men are, however, far more cheerful and intelligent than the Dinkas, Nuers and Jurs, who form the principal remaining population of the Bahr-el-Ghazal.



## CHAPTER XIV

### Slaves & Ivory

**T**HAT slavery, ivory raiding, tribal warfare and other even more savage and weird happenings have ceased to exist in the Darkest Africa of to-day is a very general and also pardonable misconception, considering that this continent, like its counterpart in the Western Hemisphere, has for many years now been partitioned, at least nominally, among the civilized powers.

It is the enormous area which makes an unexplored region of 20,000, 50,000 or even 100,000 square miles seem insignificant and of small account until one attempts to explore it. Another misleading factor is the optimism of the cartographer who draws in frontiers and, with magnificent disregard of the difference between the village of a savage tribe and the habitat of a civilized community, marks anything which has been given a name and a latitude and longitude upon his artistic product. The result is that when real and informative maps are required, as in the Boer and Great European Wars, only pretty but deceiving pictures are available for serious use.

Those of my readers who still hold fast to the belief that Africa is subdued will share the surprise which I

felt upon making the discoveries it is proposed to relate in this and the succeeding chapter. Although the trade in "black ivory" has been rendered unprofitable by a few devoted officials under a Department for the Repression of the Slave Trade, with headquarters at Khartoum and El Obeid, it still exists in the form of internal or domestic slavery in the more remote parts of Kordofan, in Darfur, the Bahr-el-Ghazal, Mongalla and along the Abyssinian frontier. The raids made in the Sobat-Pibor region are often on an extensive scale, and many unfortunate captives are carried away, every year, into the Abyssinian wilds.

In the maps at the end of this volume the widely separated regions wherein the following happenings occurred will be clearly seen. Some idea of the extent of country involved may, perhaps, be gained from the approximate estimated area of the different regions. Kordofan is believed to comprise about 117,400 square miles, the Nuba Mountains 34,600 square miles, the Upper Nile (including the Sobat-Pibor region) 60,000 square miles, Mongalla 60,700 square miles, and the Bahr-el-Ghazal 119,800 square miles. With the exception of the northern and western portions of Kordofan the whole of this immense territory may be said to come within the Black Sudan. It is the land of negroid races, equatorial forest, grass plains, swamps and curious mountains, very largely unexplored in parts. Here and there one comes across isolated Government posts on the edge of a more or less navigable river or along a recognized but often



unrecognizable track. Taken as a whole, however, the vast interior is a wild land and the home of many savage races about which little is at present known.

The first case of slavery which came directly under my notice occurred while journeying up the White Nile, between Renk and Kodok. A small detachment of the Camel Corps, from Northern Kordofan, were bringing upstream, in a Government steamer, a Nuba boy who had been captured by a party of Arabs. It occurred to me that this boy's story might prove both interesting and instructive. During the journey to Tonga, a point to which he was being conveyed by water preparatory to the 100-mile march back to his home among the Nuba Jebels, near Talodi, I learned the whole miserable tale.

It appears that he had come down on to the plain from his mountain home to obtain some grass for feeding the small-sized cattle reared among these steep granite hills, and while cutting this in a *khor* was seized round the throat by an Arab and dragged into the camp of a wandering Messeria tribe. Hurried preparations were immediately made for departure, in which he was compelled to assist, and with hands bound together in front he was forced to trot all through the night behind a baggage camel, to which he was attached by a rope. Travelling in this way for many days he was given little food, or even water when crossing the burning sandy wastes into distant Darfur. Often, while on the march, he was cruelly beaten, because of his inability through thirst and

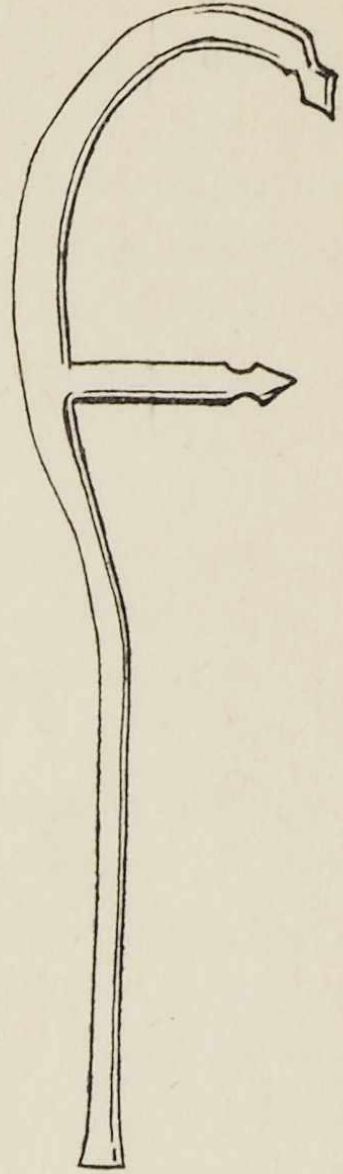
exhaustion to keep from falling into the sand and being dragged until the camel stopped. On one occasion he was cut across the body with a spear because he could not help in the loading of the camels to which he was attached owing to lack of knowledge regarding the Arab method of binding the load on to the backs of their ships of the desert.

When the caravan arrived in the somewhat more hospitable country to the south of El Fasher another slave raiding party, who had been running black ivory between the Nuba Mountains and French Equatorial Africa, was encountered. At this time, however, they had with them only one slave, a Nuba girl, who was being taken into Darfur for the harem of a sheik of the marauding tribe. From what I could learn, with the aid of a native *mamor*, the boy had been fairly well treated during the time his Arab masters stayed at different villages and wells in Darfur. After months of wandering he was brought back across the Kordofan desert, during a journey with merchandise from Fasher to Obeid. One evening, just before sunset, the caravan passed close to the camp of a Sudan Camel Corps patrol, and, after freeing himself of the bonds with which he was confined during the night, he found his way back and fell exhausted among these black desert police. After telling his story to the commanding officer the patrol commenced the pursuit of the caravan, and on coming up with it arrested the two Arabs who, months before, had effected his capture among the distant Nuba Mountains. Both the boy



and his two captors were, when I met them, on their way to Tonga and Talodi, where there are Sudan administrative posts.

Another case of slave raiding, but this time on a more wholesale scale, came to my notice while voyaging down the Bahr-el-Jebel. A British officer was returning on leave, after many months of dangerous patrol duty with a small detachment of black troops in the region to the north-west of Lake Rudolf. He told me that both ivory and slave raids were of frequent occurrence in the wild country along the south-western frontier of Abyssinia. On one occasion a punitive expedition was pursuing a party of marauders, who were returning from a raid with a large quantity of ivory and a number of slaves, and when near to the Akobo River the patrol came up with the slave gang. A fierce fight ensued, in which a British officer was killed as well as a number of black troops.



BOOMERANG CLUB

This weapon, which is used by the natives of the Abyssinian foothills, is made entirely of beaten iron. The outer curved edge is sharpened. It may be thrown like a boomerang or turned in the reverse direction and used as a battle-axe. It is about 3 ft. 4 ins. in length.

News was received, on another occasion, while the patrol was in camp, that raiders were operating near the village of Torrit, about 120 miles south-east of Mongalla. Forced marches were made to cut off the retreat of this party into Abyssinian territory, and a fight took place near the village of Sunnat, in which the raiders compelled their black captives to act as a human screen, in the thick underbush, against the fire of the patrol. In this way they succeeded in effecting a retreat without loss, but a number of their captives were unknowingly killed by their would-be rescuers.

Along the base of the Immatong Mountains, which pass through this modern slave preserve, the country is covered with heavy undergrowth as well as with patches of dense equatorial forest. The range, which forms an imposing background, varies in altitude from 5000 to 7000 feet. The scenery is most picturesque and the whole region abounds in big game. Lions, elephants, buffaloes and antelopes are to be seen almost every day while on *safari*, and these beasts have not yet become gun-shy. This vast and almost unexplored area is, however, somewhat dangerous to traverse. Every native village is stockaded, and there is always a native on the look out at the top of a neighbouring hill who sounds the alarm on a tom-tom directly strangers are seen approaching.

The natives of this region are composed of Anyuaks and a variety of negro tribes, most of whom are very tall. They go about entirely naked, except for a bunch of leaves or grass (or a small apron), worn principally

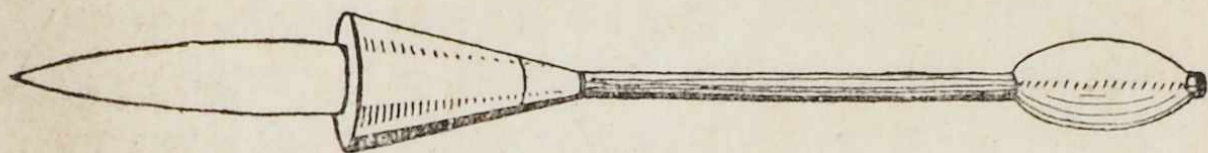




AGEIR-DINKA.

This young savage of the Melut Region is wearing full dress for a tribal dance.

by the married women. They have not yet learned either the value of money or the use of firearms. In the villages of Torrit, Sunnat, Nagiohot and Ikoto, one often sees men with a tattooed line down the right arm, and a few with a similar mark on the left arm. Each of these lines indicates that the wearer has killed a man in the defence of his village against slave raiders. One of the most curious sights is a mother carrying a child on her back, and to shield the infant from the powerful rays of the sun, here almost



ELEPHANT SPEAR

This strong weapon is used by the natives of the Immatong Range. The base is weighted with stone in a leather cover. The blade is one-third embedded in wood. The whole weapon is 5 ft. 7 ins. long. It is used from a lofty tree-branch overhanging the track used by elephants when moving through the jungle towards water.

directly overhead, a half-gourd, attached to a string round the mother's neck, is allowed to fall, like a basin, over the head and shoulders of the baby, which is supported by a bag worn like a knapsack.

Although domestic slavery still exists in Western Kordofan and Darfur the only regions where raiding takes place on anything like a large scale is along the west and south-west border of Abyssinia and on the Bahr-el-Arab in South-western Kordofan. While at Suakin, on the Red Sea, which picturesque and typically eastern little island seaport at one time had a considerable export trade in slaves to the Arabian



hinterland, I noticed the white hull of a British sloop still patrolling these waters for the prevention of this scourge of Equatorial Africa.

Ivory raiding in the Sobat-Pibor and Mongalla regions is another source of trouble. Parties of raiders from the turbulent and ill-governed Abyssinian highlands descend into the equatorial jungles of the South-eastern Sudan and kill large numbers of elephants, regardless of the weight of ivory, by firing the jungle and compelling a whole herd to run the gauntlet of a murderous fusilade. It often happens that the natives of this distant region, which is not yet properly explored, are compelled, under threat of being carried away into slavery, to assist the ivory raiders. A group of villages are informed that unless a certain number of tusks are kept ready for the marauders slaves will be taken in their place.

In the year 1917-18 a considerable force of the King's African Rifles, from Uganda, and of the Equatorial Battalion, Sudan Army, were heavily engaged with some 5000 or 6000 wild Turkana raiders in the Lomogol-Lorusia regions bordering South-western Abyssinia. After considerable fighting the ivory and cattle raiders were completely routed and much loot recovered. The natives living within the frontiers of either the Sudan or Uganda are not allowed to possess firearms, and consequently they form an easy prey to the raider from across the wild border.

While it is very difficult to prevent these raids across



NUBA WOMEN OF THE KARKO RANGE.

The earthenware pots are used for storing water in the cave strongholds.



a long and unexplored frontier, the few white officers and native troops now in this barbarous region often sacrifice either life or health in the endeavour to make these raids unprofitable. The usual method is to cut off the retreat of these forces, and by killing as many as possible compel the remainder to relinquish the booty they have collected and hurry back into Abyssinia.

## CHAPTER XV

### Black Secret Societies

**I**N the extreme west of the Bahr-el-Ghazal, on the borders of the French Congo, according to information given me by an explorer who had passed through this region about a year previous, there are special circumcision schools among the Kreich and Banda peoples. The former is a negroid tribe widely scattered over an area of country lying between the parallels of North Latitude  $10^{\circ}$  and  $8^{\circ}$ , in Longitude  $24^{\circ}$  to  $25^{\circ} 50' E$ . The headquarters are in the vicinity of Kafiahangi, but isolated groups, mostly under the all-conquering Zande Sultans, are found even beyond the Pongo River. They are physically a very fine race, lighter in colour than the Banda, who are a low negroid type originally inhabiting a very large portion of this wild region.

When the boys of these tribes reach the age of about ten or twelve years a number of them, from all the villages around, are collected to form a school, which is held in a remote area of forest and lasts for several months during the dry season. The rites and ceremonies connected with it are kept strictly secret especially from the women of the tribe. It appears that each boy is circumcised on arriving at the huts



prepared for the school, and after about two weeks of convalescence is trained in hunting and forest craft generally. All the pupils are compelled to sleep on their backs in order to strengthen and straighten the spine. To ensure this being done during the whole night their feet are firmly held in stocks, effectually preventing the sleepers from turning over.

The school is supervised by older men, and is run on such spartan lines that a number of the physically weak die every year under the severe treatment meted out during this training. From the fact that the parents of boys who succumb are not expected to show the slightest sign of grief it may be assumed that these schools are partly carried on with the object of eliminating the unfit. It is interesting to note, however, that certain methods of a curative character are employed. Among these is the cold water douche and the manipulation of the spine to correct minor deformities before they have become permanent. Dieting also seems to play an important part in the general scheme of treatment. Although hunting parties are formed the meat obtained in this way is eaten only by the men taking part. Certain roots and herbs are given to the boys, and cold water bathing is insisted upon. After each immersion, however, the body is massaged with oil or fat. All of this is an argument in favour of the theory that, quite apart from the practice of circumcision, which was probably copied from the Arabs, there is a definite aim in these savage schools of physical culture.

When the boys return to their respective villages big dances are held, at which they are expected to perform almost unceasingly for many hours without undue fatigue. This is evidently to exhibit their increased physical powers of endurance before their own community. These two tribes also practise the excision of girls, but nothing is so far known about the rites attending this custom.

While in the Bahr-el-Ghazal region I heard queer stories of black secret societies operating along the Congo frontier, around Meridi, Yambio, Tembura and in the more inaccessible areas of the Sudd to the south-west of Lake No. The bestial orgies of these cults were said to be so dreadful and so secret that one powerful native ruler had lost three of his wives and did not dare to retaliate. A native police officer, who had been sent into this remote region in an endeavour to find out about one of these societies, discovered, in the nick of time, that the mouthpiece of his pipe had been stuffed with the most deadly poison.

With the aid of others who had passed through these regions, as well as the Belgian Congo and French Equatorial Africa, supplemented by questioning the natives themselves, and the use of certain material placed at my disposal by the Sudan Government, I was able to piece together, in a necessarily more or less haphazard manner, an account of the objects and secret rites of at least one of the most powerful of these hideous societies, which has many thousand adherents among the pagan peoples of Equatoria.



This widespread society is called *Bili*, and appears to have its headquarters in the Yambio district, a region of dense forest in which sleeping sickness is prevalent. Among the powerful Zande tribes who inhabit this remote area *Bili* has many adherents and is generally described in awed whispers as an evil fetish, dangerous to offend, disobey, or even talk about. In thick jungle, which, owing to the heavy annual rains, is often inaccessible for many months of the year, the witch-doctors build the *tukls*, or houses, of this mysterious cult.

It is in and around these *Bili* houses that the obscene rites take place, and the local members meet to organize a periodical reign of terrorism, taking full advantage of the superstitious fears of a primitive people. The three most important objects of this savage secret society are: (1) to protect its members and to place them above all tribal law; (2) to extort, by threats supported by mysticism, anything they may require from members of their own and other tribes who are not adherents of *Bili*; and (3) to practise dangerous and immoral rites, with the aid of the drug hashish, and the large number of young girl adherents who have been terrorized into membership of *Bili*.

These infamous practices are carried on by proclaiming that resistance to any demand made by the society, or the betrayal of its secrets, will lead to instant death by magical agencies. To support this claim the wives or daughters of a chief or headman are spirited

away to become the playthings of members of this cult, and, if the angered parent endeavours to recover his lost property—for woman is real estate throughout the African wilds—he invariably dies in some mysterious way—usually by one or other of the virulent poisons known only to the witch-doctors. On the other hand, if the irate parent takes no active steps to recover his womenfolk, then the whole tribe, of which he is headman or chief, sees that their leader is afraid of provoking the wrath of *Bili*, and so the society gains more adherents.

Demands are made on individuals, and never on whole tribes or villages, for the comparatively few things needed by savages. In this way its members obtain, wherever possible without work or trouble, all that is required for their subsistence and enjoyment. Young girls either join voluntarily or are terrorized into it, and one of the conditions is that they shall never marry or have relations with anyone who is not an adherent of *Bili*. If they are already married they are forbidden to have intercourse with their husbands until these also join this society. One of their most obscene practices is the violation of each girl member in turn by the men of the local *Bili* house.

The members of this cult consider themselves superior beings to the remainder of the tribe, and quickly undermine the authority of the chief. The Sultan of Yango, head of a large tribe in the Meridi country, had three of his wives stolen by the *Bili* sect while he was temporarily absent from his village.



Being threatened with death and knowing the power of the society he dare not either pursue or attempt to punish the guilty parties. Everyone in these villages and along a wide stretch of the Congo frontier knows and speaks of *Bili* with terror and apprehension. They live in daily fear of a demand which they know will have to be complied with on pain of death. From the information I was able to obtain it appears that the votaries of this cult, especially among the so-called Niam-Niam tribes, are rapidly increasing in number, due, very largely, to the thought that by joining they avoid the terrible demands and penalties. Many deaths are rightly or wrongly attributed to its agency, and a village headman was found poisoned, with a piece of *Bili* wood (a special fetish) tied round his neck, while I remained in the Ghazal.

Each man and woman, on being initiated, receives a special name which is never used in ordinary conversation, but is that by which they are always addressed by other members of the organization. In this way "tribes" are created within the ordinary village communities who, while belonging body and soul to *Bili*, are nevertheless openly subjects of the Zande Sultans or other chiefs. Two men who died of poison in the hospital at Wau in 1918 declared that there was a religious side of this cult, and, in support of this, rattles, reed-whistles and chips of special fetish wood, to which the magical powers of life and death are ascribed, have been found in *Bili* houses.

So far as is known no white man has ever actually

been present at one of the initiation ceremonies. A native who had left this region, when describing it, made clear the fact that the ceremony is a combination of fetish worship and gross immorality. It appears that every adherent is scarred in a way which renders him known for life to every other member. The actual design takes different forms according to the *Bili* house to which he belongs, but is generally a series of cuts made with a red-hot spear-point on the back. Girls are marked with a line on the front of their bodies. Hashish and vice are the inducements offered to attend each gathering.

The witch-doctors are believed to possess the ability to cause and cure disease, ensure good crops, and of being able to kill people by lightning and other supposedly supernatural agency. As already pointed out the severe storms to which this region is subject, combined with the high percentage of iron in the earth is, however, the real cause of the many casualties from these electrical disturbances. Nevertheless they are all ascribed to *Bili*, and in order to secure immunity from destruction extortionate fees are charged by the chiefs of the cult. It often happens that a man is told to move his hut to more open country, to raise it on poles, or to place the skin of a leopard on the floor. In a like manner any man who does not contribute in any way to the society very soon has his small patch of cultivation, or his *tukl*, destroyed by elephants passing over them. There is little doubt that these huge beasts are driven in the desired direction, because it



is an offence for adherents to kill an elephant near the local *Bili* house.

When sufficient supplies are not forthcoming because the number of adherents outweigh the resources of the community, certain women novitiates are required to spend two or three months cultivating ground for the chiefs and witch-doctors, during which time they live within the zeriba of the *Bili* house. These latter structures vary considerably. Many of them have six openings, one being for the use of patients who come to be cured, another is used by women, a third by men, a fourth by witch-doctors, a fifth by the local chief of the cult, and a sixth by those who come to pay ransoms or demands. It would, however, seem probable that the real object of these numerous exits is to enable people to come and go unobserved. In the centre of the hut a fire is continually kept alight, and the ashes from this are carefully preserved for the purpose of anointing the bodies of new members and the sick.

During a ceremony guards are placed along all the jungle paths leading to the *Bili* house. On one occasion a British official discovered that a ceremony was to take place somewhere in the forest around, and knowing that a number of girls had recently been enticed away by members of the sect he succeeded in obtaining a guide who knew not only the meeting-place, but also the secret password. This courageous officer, with only a small party of native police, approached the *Bili* house. The scout guarding the jungle trail challenged in the darkness and was answered

by the guide. A moment later he was seized by the police, but unfortunately there were other scouts in the forest around and the alarm was given which enabled all except three of the members to escape, carrying with them their girl captives. It is believed that these found refuge among devotees in the Belgian Congo.

The meeting-place in this instance was simply a cleared space in the most dense part of the forest, with a *rekuba*, or grass shelter, in the middle. Under this was found a quantity of hashish and a number of fetish objects. All that could be gained from an interrogation of the prisoners was a confirmation of the purposes and immoral rites of this black secret society of Equatorial Africa.



## CHAPTER XVI

### To the Dar Nuba

**F**ROM the Nile-Congo watershed to the Nuba Mountains of Central Kordofan, by way of Kosti and El Obeid—the natural gateway of this wild region—is a journey which has to be considered more from the point of view of time than either distance or difficulty, as such are understood by those who cross the wide, open spaces of the world. Although the journey did not exceed 1200 miles it was an unfortunate fact that 900 of these miles, down the Bahr-el-Jebel and White Nile to Kosti, had to be traversed at a speed of not more than six miles an hour, and it does not need a mathematician to calculate the loss of valuable time involved.

Had it not been for anxiety to reach the Dar Nuba at least a month or two before the beginning of the heavy thunder and rain storms which herald the approach of the wet season, in May, making travel by camel extremely difficult, I could well have regarded as a much-needed and interesting rest this return journey through the Sudd and big game country of the Upper Nile, with its wondrous sunsets and its soft tropical nights, disturbed only by the oily gurgle of the river, the distant howl of a wild beast and the

lurid flames of a grass fire. As it was, however, the innumerable stops at little native villages, where the Government steamer collected the mails, often a single letter sent by runner from some camp in the far interior, proved somewhat irksome notwithstanding the really interesting character of these oases of barbaric life in the great African wilderness. If they were better known, they would afford the many travellers who desire to see something of the wilds without suffering discomfort a wonderful experience, but it was to me a source of irritation, relieved only by several interesting dashes into the surrounding country, in the company of an ardent naturalist, while the remarkably comfortable little stern-wheeler, which reminded me of my early days on the Yukon and the Amazon, lay alongside the river-bank and its clusters of native *tukls*.

At Kosti, which a few years ago was only a small native village and is now a busy Arab centre with a large market, I joined the railway for El Obeid, covering the 191 miles to the chief town of Kordofan in less than twelve hours. This remarkable desert railway at present forms the southernmost link in the northern section of the great Cape to Cairo system. After passing through a belt of red acacia, or *sunt* trees, the country between the White Nile and El Obeid may be described in text-book phraseology as an undulating plain covered with low scrub. Here and there one sees a few grey acacias and an occasional Arab village, like Tendelti, a centre for the



export of gum arabic, sesame, ground nuts and millet.

About El Obeid, which at one time had a very bad reputation for malaria, very little can be said which would not be a mere repetition of previous descriptions of Arab towns. There are the square mud buildings, reminiscent of the great city of Omdurman, the surrounding fringe of grass huts, in which dwell the majority of the 12,000 natives, similar to those of the Lower White Nile villages, and there is the Mosque, the Square and the endless stream of dark-visaged white-robed figures. Only in one aspect did El Obeid differ from others of its kind scattered over the deserts of North Africa. Here I saw the bull-riders of Kordofan for the first time. Men going to and from the outskirts of the town, armed with long spears, were seated on these huge but apparently patient animals. Women and children marketing heaped their purchases on to the backs of bulls and then climbed on to the top of these piles for the ride home. The native saddle consists of a hoop-shaped straw mat with a V-shaped wooden tree. There is no girth-strap, and the saddle with its load is balanced by the man or woman sitting on top. It is remarkable that both rider and load does not slip off when these lumbering animals move forward, lurching from side to side, but I never saw a mishap of this kind, and was told that in South-western Kordofan the Messeria Arabs of Dar Homr employ bull cavalry against the Dinka tribes of the Bahr-el-Arab region.

El Obeid is the centre of the trade in gum arabic, although the native grain and cattle markets are largely attended by Baggara and other Kordofan tribesmen, who come in from the hundreds of square miles of scrub-covered desert with which the town is surrounded. Although there are one or two Englishmen, who are either Government officials or are engaged in the gum trade, residing in El Obeid, there is no proper European quarter, apart from the Government buildings which are divided from the town by an open space. Commerce is mostly in the hands of Syrians and Greeks.

Not wishing to remain in the vicinity of El Obeid any longer than was necessary to obtain camels and guides for the long journey south, through the Nuba Mountains, I set about the work with a determination to complete it in a day or two. Unfortunately one of the few Englishmen then residing in El Obeid, and to whom I had letters of introduction, was away in the gum forests. However, I succeeded in arranging with a Syrian merchant for a small but well-equipped caravan, and while the animals for this were being collected I paid a flying visit to one of the famous gum gardens of Kordofan.

It is not generally known that there is a wide belt of acacia trees, of the particular species from which either gum arabic or the inferior *talh* is obtained, which stretches across Africa, from Nigeria, Lake Chad and Senegal to the White Nile. These acacia trees are often little more than bushes. The tapping



is done by natives with narrow axes, not unlike the tomahawk of the Red Indian, and great care has to be taken as the acacia is of a very thorny nature, and nasty sores are sometimes produced from seemingly trifling scratches.

The general aspect of a gum forest is totally different to what might be expected from the name. The trees have comparatively little foliage, are seldom more than six or eight feet high, and are often scattered over the flat, sandy plain, at a distance of 100 or 200 yards apart. On the day when I visited one of these so-called forests, about 40 miles from El Obeid, the temperature was hovering round 100° F., in the shade, which, incidentally, did not exist when once the walls of the town had been left behind. So blinding was the sunlight reflected from the desert sand that blue glasses were essential to prevent the glare from burning itself into the brain.

At the commencement of the dry season, in December, the natives, many of whom are of the Bederia tribes and who work the vast areas of forest in which the gum-producing trees are found as independent collectors, set out from their villages, armed only with the small axes and skins of water, to begin the tapping of the trees. About seven days after the tree has been tapped, or cut, the gum commences to flow, but, being of a thick viscous nature, it is not sufficiently liquid to drip from the trunk. After congealing and drying in the sun the globule, which varies from one to two inches in diameter, is knocked off the

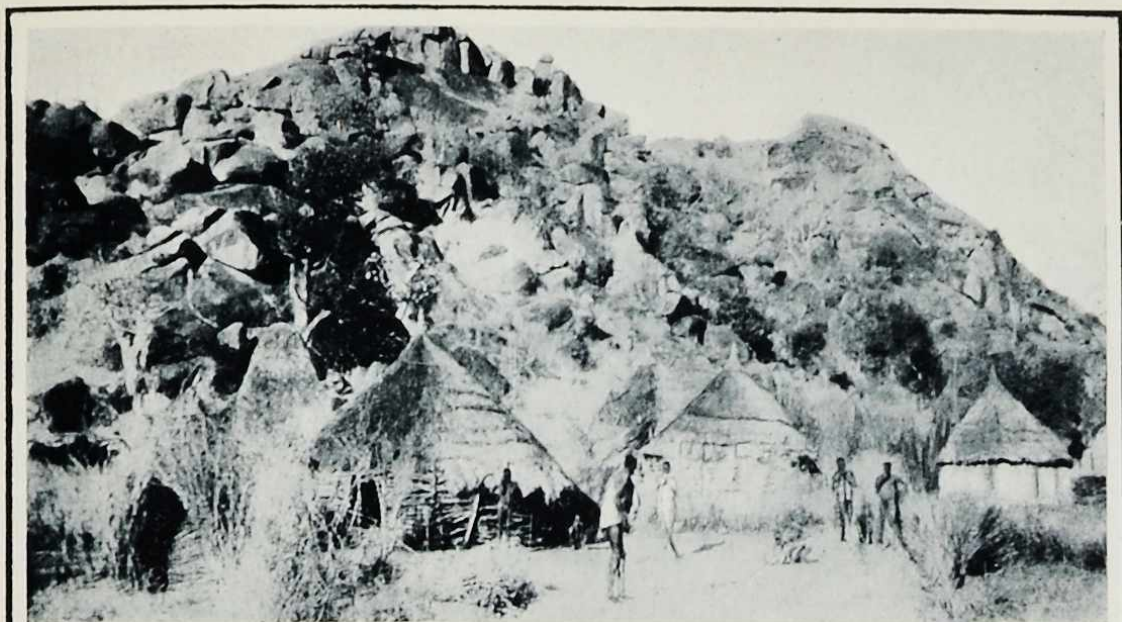
bark into a small bag and the resinous sap begins to flow again. Until May collections are made every seven or ten days, when the tree is allowed to heal in readiness for the brief rainy season.

The gum collected is packed into leather saddlebags which are placed in pairs on each side of a camel. The laden animals from different areas are then formed into a caravan, and, after a journey which varies from days to weeks according to the distance, these camel trains deposit their loads in the market enclosure of El Obeid. When this has been done the long lines of camels are seen making their way back to areas of forest which stretch across Kordofan and Darfur to the confines of French Equatorial Africa.

On these desert journeys both drivers and camels are dependent for water either on the few wells or upon rain water stored in the curious *tebeldi* trees, which grow to an enormous size along the southern fringe of the great desert. The huge trunks of this particular tree are hollowed out and, during the rainy season, are naturally filled with water. Usually a small payment is demanded from the drivers using this supply, because the trees are hollowed and tended by Arabs living in the vicinity. As an additional precaution the caravans usually carry back with them from El Obeid a plentiful supply of large, green water-melons, which serve as food and drink for the useful but ill-tempered camels.

After the gum has been dumped in the El Obeid market it is sold by brokers to European and native





A NUBA JEBEL AND VILLAGE OF THE GULUD GROUP. In this case the huts are among the boulders below the summit.

A TYPICAL NUBA VILLAGE. A mass of huts huddled together among the granite boulders, high up on one of the Jebels.

A NUBA VILLAGE PREPARING FOR A DANCE. The huts are all built close together. In the centre is a tebeldi tree, in the hollow trunk of which water is stored.



merchants, and, as there is an export duty levied on it by the Sudan Government, all transactions have to be registered. The final sorting of the gum to remove stones and bark, is mostly done by native women, many of whom are West African negresses on their way to Mecca, and who have halted with their families on the long pilgrim's road across Africa in order to make sufficient in the gum gardens and markets of El Obeid to supply their few wants during the remaining thousand miles march to the Hedjaz. This extraordinary journey takes some of these pilgrims their whole life to accomplish. It is often the Mohammedans only inducement to travel and see something of the world beyond his immediate vision.

My only difficulty in El Obeid was to obtain an English-speaking boy to act as interpreter and servant, but I eventually succeeded in securing the services of Mahmud, who was half-Arab and half-Nuba, an excellent combination for a trip into the southern *jebels*, where the plains are inhabited by Bederia, Hawazma and Messeria Arabs and the granite mountains and tree-covered hills are occupied by Nubas. While in Africa I had a number of boys, and always found them excellent in every way when they could be kept from spitting into the cooking pans in order to clean them!

When at last I managed to shake the sand of El Obeid from my feet by climbing on to the flat, wool-covered saddle of a camel, it soon dawned on me that the discomforts of a *nuggar* among the swamps of the



Bahr-el-Ghazal were nothing compared to the tortures of camel-riding over the desert. We left El Obeid in a south-westerly direction and proceeded at the leisurely pace common to "ships of the desert," along the track to Sungikai, camping for the first night near the Fertangul Wells, only about 19 miles from the town. Not being accustomed to the peculiar roll of the "ship" I ached from the waist upwards, and resolved, for once at least, to follow the Arab custom of remaining in camp during the heat of the day and riding from sunset until dawn. When I put this into practice some 24 hours later I quickly discovered that the cold night winds were almost as trying as the heat and glare of the day. The light northerly breeze, decreasing the temperature from  $100^{\circ}$  F. at noon to  $37^{\circ}$  F. at midnight, sent me shivering into a blanket which I wrapped round myself while riding. Towards morning we passed the camp fires of several caravans. The nomadic tribesmen were wrapped to their eyes in white robes, evidently feeling, as much as myself, the unusual cold for such a southerly position as  $12^{\circ} 52' N.$

At night the Kordofan plains are curiously fascinating. No sound breaks the stillness of the vast desolation. Even the camels tread softly in the sand and strange noises are conjured up by the uncanny silence. Overhead the stars are large and brilliant, for there is as little moisture in the air above as in the ground below. Now and again a few ghastly white lines on the desert catch stray gleams of starlight. They are the bones of animals who have fallen by the

way. The vultures, ever on the watch from high above, have cleared the carcase of entrails leaving the flesh and skin for the hyenas. Nothing alters as mile after mile is traversed in oppressive solitude, there is the ever-receding rim of sand, the sparse bush, an occasional *tebelidi* or acacia tree, but all look alike beneath the indigo vault with its millions of scintillating pin-points of ethereal light.

On the evening of the fourth day after leaving El Obeid we passed out of the heavy sand on to a level expanse of black cotton soil, with the surface very hard and cracked. Camel-riding now became an endless succession of bone-rattling jerks. These animals were fairly comfortable, when one had become accustomed to the motion, while passing over soft ground; but on hard, sun-baked earth the shaking became so unbearable that I dismounted and proceeded on foot. On reaching the wells of Sungikai we came into the midst of several camps of the Hawazma tribe, and, although it meant the loss of valuable time, I decided to halt for a day in the near vicinity.

This section of the Baggara were among the most fanatical of the followers of the Mahdi, and were present in force at the massacre of the army, 8000 strong, under Hicks Pasha, in the Forest of Shekan on November 5th, 1883. Some two days previous to arriving at Sungikai, when about 30 miles south of El Obeid, we had passed along the western edge of this field of disaster, which, undoubtedly, was the cause



of plunging the Sudan into the abyss of warfare, slavery, isolation and misery from which this vast country is only now being lifted by the untiring efforts of a mere handful of British officials.

The Hawazma are a large and scattered tribe whose principal occupation is cattle and horse-breeding. They are nomadic, like all Baggara, and wander about from one watering-place to another over the plains in the centre of the Dar Nuba. There are many small patches of cultivated land around Sungikai, and a number of more or less permanent huts. It is the winter headquarters of the Abd el Ali section, who were formerly slave raiders on a large scale, obtaining their captives from parties of Nubas who ventured down from their mountain-top strongholds. It was the custom of these Arab horsemen to make periodical drives. A line of mounted tribesmen would descend on the Nubas, engage and disarm them, while a second line coming on foot behind bound the captives and marched them away in gangs. It was the invasion of these and other Baggara tribes, who found their way south from Morocco, Tripoli and Tunis, round the negro kingdoms of the north and west, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, which drove the Nubas from the plains of their Dar, or country, to the curious jebels, where they made such a fierce stand that there are strongholds to-day into which no white man or Arab has ever penetrated. Later on, when I returned to El Obeid, an expedition largely composed of the Sudanese Camel Corps was being

assembled for an advance against one of these mountain strongholds to, bring its wild inhabitants within the pale of the Pax Britannica.

Although a fine Arab race the Hawazma still need firm treatment, and travellers through their country should note that they are extremely afraid of the evil-eye. During the first morning of my visit to their camp I attempted to photograph a *fiki*, quite unaware of the fact that he was a holy man, held in great esteem by the whole tribe. The cries of anger warned me in time, and with a *sang froid* which I was far from feeling I continued to level my camera, but at a nearby tent made of strips of bark from the *sunt* tree. Upon seeing the mistake which had apparently been made the hubbub ceased and I passed unmolested through the encampment, which contained only a very few permanent dwellings of mud and *dukhn* stalks.

There were remarkably few young people in this Hawazma village, and on making enquiries I learned that this was due to these nomads moving south during the dry season in search of pasture for their cattle and horses. On the morning of the second day after leaving Sungikai we arrived at Dilling. Had it not been for a number of confusing tracks, which caused us to take a branch road leading to El Nila and then retrace our steps, we should have covered in a much shorter space of time the 33 miles between these two places. Apart from the little Government post there is a native village on the east side of the *jebel* and,



much to my relief, an excellent supply of water was found close at hand as well as in a neighbouring *khôr*, called Abu Habl. About Dilling itself, which is situated in Lat.  $12^{\circ} 3' N.$ , and Long.  $29^{\circ} 39' E.$ , all that can be said is that it forms an excellent base for expeditions into the surrounding Nuba Hills, including the wild Nyima group. I was greatly impressed with the first view of Dar Nuba, which differs entirely in aspect from either the sandy wastes of the Northern Sudan or the equatorial forests and grass jungles of Central Africa. A black-soiled plain, dappled here and there with patches and hillocks of light gravel, stretches away on all sides. Rising abruptly from this plain are the rugged mountains of the Nuba, some mere hills of granite, and others, in the far distance, lofty, bluish grey and rugged of outline.

From this it must not be imagined that there is any definite or impressive range. The piles of granite boulders forming these hills, apparently thrown up by some dynamic force from the earth's centre in the days when the world was young, rise abruptly from the bush and tree-covered levels in small isolated groups. Some are partially covered with open and almost leafless forest, while others are a mass of bare rock. Jebel Dilling itself, which seems to have a Nuba population of about 2000, is composed of four small detached hills. About ten or twelve miles distant to the south-west can be seen the curious slate-blue outline of the Nyima group, largely unexplored,

which consists of a number of *jebels*, varying from 300 to 1000 feet in height, all of which are more or less isolated from each other.

From the first this lonely range attracted me more than any other in the vicinity of Dilling, and I resolved that after a brief halt to enable me to learn something about the country and its ways I would camp within its shadow for exploration among its boulders and bushes. No estimate of the population of the Nyima Range is possible because each *jebel* has its own community, ranging from about 300 to 2000 people, and, more curious still, the inhabitants of one hill have little intercourse with those living in the concealed villages and caves on neighbouring masses of rock. Almost every Nuba Mountain, including the near-by Dilling group, is honeycombed with caves, which, although seldom used as dwellings, form a last retreat for these queer people when any attempt is made to storm their mountain strongholds.

One of the finest *jebels* in this part of the Dar Nuba, which stretches away for about 120 to 150 miles south, east and west, is the mass of rock called Temain, which can only properly be seen from the top of a smaller hill in the neighbourhood of Dilling. The villages, with their small patches of cultivation, are situated on a large plateau, 500 feet above the plain, and are unapproachable except by a difficult and circuitous route over a neighbouring hill, called Morun. The water supply on this lofty little plateau is excellent, and over 2000 wild Nubas live a life of almost complete



isolation in their curious concrete-like huts among the boulders, trees and caves of this rugged hill.

The plains between these isolated *jebels* are, during the dry season, hard and cracked, and numerous deep but parched *khors*, or watercourses, which become very boggy in the rainy months, make travelling by camel extremely slow and tedious. Even under the best conditions a day's journey seldom exceeds 20 miles. Around the base and up the slopes of many hills there are open forests of acacia, *gurgan*, *kuk*, *selgan*, *dabka* and other trees. These and smaller bushes often grow on the most precipitous and boulder-strewn slopes in patches of cotton soil between the rocky outcrops. As I moved about among the *jebels* the whole country struck me as a remarkable fertile region, considering the comparative scarcity of water, and, from the scenic point of view, it is a study in black, grey-green and azure. There are the dark, level plains of cotton soil, the grey-green of the acacia and other trees, the greyish brown granite boulders and the inimitable blue of the African sky. Here and there, from the summit of one of these hills, can be seen areas of light sandy soil interspersing the black plains, herds of small-sized cattle, sheep and goats, little patches of tobacco, dhurra, cotton, sesame, maize, pumpkins and earth nuts. There is little in the landscape to suggest the mysterious rites and customs of a people who are, undoubtedly, the most curious in the whole continent. It is true, however, that the country is extremely wild and rugged, but,

when seen under the brilliant morning sun, it is a pleasing contrast to the interminable, tawny and glaring deserts over which I had recently passed.

On my second morning among the Nuba Mountains I succeeded, after much labour, in climbing some distance up one of the *jebels* in the vicinity of Dilling. Only a faint northerly breeze ruffled the coarse grass and almost leafless trees, which appeared lifeless and parched in the stifling heat. I could scarcely bring myself to believe that within range of vision were some of the wildest and least known spots within the length and breadth of the African continent. While gazing at the distant, slate-blue outline of the Nyima Range, the reported scene of much bloodshed and many weird customs, where to-day there are few Nuba women who will marry a man before he has killed someone, I was suddenly made to realize in a somewhat dramatic manner that the whole region was not as peaceful as the tranquillity of the scene suggested.

Having finished my preliminary survey of the surrounding country, I was about to return the field-glasses to their case when I caught a side glance of a black giant standing between two rocks on my left hand. It dawned on me in a moment that my unannounced climb of one of their sacred hills might be misconstrued. The stories of several murders, both attempted and actually committed, in this wild country during quite recent times, were known to me, and I realized that to have placed myself in this somewhat hazardous position without being able to



speaking a single word of any one of the 18 or 20 Nuba dialects was the stupid act of a novice. Turning round I raised my hand to show that I was unarmed, and came face to face with not only one but a small group of the most repulsive-looking and completely naked savages which it has ever been my lot to meet in a like position.

Two of these Nuba carried bone-headed spears, but the third was armed with an old Remington rifle, which, no doubt, he had acquired by the simple expedient of killing its original owner—probably a Dervish, fleeing from the stricken field of battle after the defeat of the Khalifa, through these mountains to the remote plains of the Dar Homr. The lower half of the body of one man was smeared with white paint, and another had a ring through the right nostril. All three were stark naked, wearing only a necklace of beads and two bone armlets. Those with spears were evidently young men, but the third was a giant, between 6 and 7 feet in height, and was wearing curious sandals. Although distinctly of the negroid type there was something in the half-shaven heads, the protruding lips, flat noses and deep set eyes which gave them a most ferocious appearance.

All these first impressions of the Nuba, which take so long to describe, were indelibly registered during that first tense moment when one comes suddenly upon savages of unknown temper and custom. For several seconds neither the Nuba nor myself made the slightest movement. This was all to the good for it

enabled me to overcome the first shock of surprise which the unexpected meeting had caused, and to get my brain at work on the problem of allaying suspicion. Experience had taught me that when dealing with all savage races a friendly fearlessness is the only safe attitude, whatever one's private feelings may be. The ready assumption of friendliness tends to allay the suspicion which is the dominant factor in the mind of all savages on meeting a white man, and the fearlessness conveys to the native mind the impression of security in the knowledge of power. Whether or not these precautions were necessary I was not then in a position to determine, but later experience throughout the Nuba Mountains made me even less inclined to take uncalled-for risks among a people who regard the murder of anyone outside their own little community more as a virtue than a crime.

My first movement was to point down the hill, and make signs indicating that I wanted to find an easier path than the rock-strewn causeway up which I had climbed. At first the older man scowled while the two young braves fingered their spears uneasily. The bone points of these weapons were, I knew, usually dipped in a virulent poison made with a decoction from the decayed carcass of a venomous snake mixed with the juice of a plant of the *Euphorbia* species. Eventually, however, I succeeded in making myself understood, and what I took to be the father of this unclothed family of fine physique, proceeded to climb up instead of down the hill. I followed, hoping that



the way would lead through one of the concealed villages, usually screened from view by the boulders and bushes, and approachable only by a narrow and difficult trail. My luck was not to extend this far, however, for after a few minutes' stiff climb with the tropical sun beating down mercilessly on to the bare rock, the Nubas turned down hill. Wet through with perspiration, I followed them into a narrow belt of trees and bushes, which seemed to cover the base of the hill, and out on to the edge of the open plain. When I turned round, intending by the bestowal of a small pocket-knife to get on to a more friendly footing for future occasions, they had mysteriously and silently disappeared. I knew better than to follow without further knowledge of the Nuba and their ways.

## CHAPTER XVII

### The Secret of the Mountain-tops

**T**HE chief incidents in the life of every individual are birth, marriage and death. All of which events are usually marked by some appropriate ceremony in savage as well as civilized countries. It was, therefore, upon these fundamentals that I decided to begin my investigations among the Nubas. As time went on I not only succeeded in obtaining a Nuba boy as guide—much to the disgust of Mahmud—but also in getting on to a more or less friendly footing with the people of Jebel Fassu of the Nyima group.

The inhabitants of this little range have retained intact both their religion and customs, and were therefore far more interesting than the Nubas of certain hills who, through weakness or treachery, fell victims to the invading Dervish armies, and afterwards assimilated some of the customs and beliefs of their conquerors. Writing of Nuba history calls to mind the fact that these people, who were driven from the plains by successive waves of invasion, and afterwards succeeded in holding out among the mountain strongholds of their queer land, are, to-day, much in the same position and state of barbarism as the



Ancient Britons when they retreated into the Welsh Mountains before the invading hosts of Imperial Rome.

It was, while halting just before sunset, on my way back to camp from this little hill that I had an unpleasant experience with a swarm of bees. The camels had been brought to a standstill, while both animals and drivers were given a drink, and I had taken some careful bearings of the track leading through some patches of cultivation and, in a tortuous manner, up the rugged slopes beyond, when a black cloud of these insects filled the rapidly cooling air around with a low drone. In a moment the swarm had settled on everything and everyone. I received several nasty stings on the face and hands, one of which has left a permanent scar. Two of my camel-drivers ran away and left their unmanageable beasts plunging so that the packs came perilously near to being deposited on the light gravelly soil around.

Had I dismounted before the arrival of the bees it would not have been so uncomfortable, but perched on the top of a plunging camel one of two things must occur—either I could leave my face unprotected or else release my grip on the front of the box-like saddle. In the excitement and pain of the moment I chose the latter course and was immediately thrown on to the hard ground with more force than dignity. Only with great difficulty was I able to keep clear of the hoofs of the plunging beasts who were moving in

circles, but fortunately Mahmud came to the rescue and goaded the frightened and irritated animals away from where I had fallen. The cloud of bees departed as quickly as they had come, and I learned afterwards that it is inadvisable to halt, even temporarily, in this part of the Dar Nuba just before sunset, otherwise these swarms of insects are liable to settle on everything around during their search for water in the dry season. Camp should either be made before sunset or after dark.

The Nubas of the Nyima Range and of the Dilling *jebels* are not quite such a blue-black colour as those of the more southern hills. They are a race of fine physique, and each individual tribe appears to live on its own hill, cultivating a patch of ground near the base, as well as on terraces carefully made across the slopes. The inhabitants of each *jebel*, both men and women, scar their bodies in different and distinctive ways, and both sexes shave their heads in such a manner as to leave a mass of bushy hair on the crown only. While in their villages on the hill-sides the men and unmarried girls walk about completely naked, but the married women invariably wear a long strip of cloth down the front and back, suspended from a thin girdle of beads.

It did not take me long to find out the reason for the distrust with which the Nubas regard all strangers. They have for centuries suffered badly from Arab slave raids. During the Mahdia many attempts were made by the Dervish armies to storm these hill-top strong-



holds, and wherever successful, almost the entire population was carried away into slavery. It so happened, however, that most of the Nyima Hills succeeded in holding out, although Jebel Sultap, which rises from the plains in close proximity to Jebel Fassu, was eventually captured and its people enslaved. The latter hill is very broken in formation and is honeycombed with caves, the entrances to many of which are concealed from view by boulders and brushwood.

One of the great difficulties confronting the traveller in the Dar Nuba is the extraordinary fact that each little hill, or community, speaks a language which is totally unintelligible to most of its neighbours, and it transpired later that the particular dialect known to Mahmud was that of the Temain group, away to the south. However, with the aid of signs, and later on the services of a Nuba who had been employed in Dilling and understood Arabic, I gradually collected a mass of notes regarding the habits and customs of these queer people. It was, however, a long and tedious business because I had first to address Mahmud in careful and very simple English, and he had then to ask the question in Arabic. Fortunately the Nuba interpreter was often able to reply without referring to a third party.

Starting with birth, which among civilized communities is usually associated with certain rites, I discovered, much to my astonishment, that these pagans have a ceremony similar in many ways to that of Christian

peoples. About fifteen days after the birth of a child all the relatives are assembled by the priests—called *kujurs* by the Arabs of the plains. The chief *kujur* then kills a chicken and after placing it in water holds the dead and dripping bird over the child's head. All the relatives repeat the name given to the infant, and the *kujur* then carries it into his *Arro*, or house of spirits and spits on it by way of blessing. Later on, in my journey through the Dar Nuba, I was walking in a village where I had made many friends when one of these *kujurs*, with the customary far-away expression on his face, deliberately spat at my chest. On the spur of the moment I was inclined to regard this as a direct insult, but a second's thought brought to mind the baptism ceremony which I had seen on Jebel Fassu, and I realized that instead of being an affront of a most objectionable kind it was a pagan form of greeting and blessing which is evidently in vogue among more than one of the Nuba tribes.

This was the beginning of my study of the Nuba religion, which produced so many surprises. Without this key no connected story of the life and customs of these people is possible, and, therefore, although I did not learn all the religious rites and ceremonies during my visits to the *jebels* of Dilling and Fassu, it seems advisable, for the purpose of continuity, to give here what appears to be a complete account of the strange spiritualistic beliefs of this curious mountain race of Southern Kordofan.

A great majority of the Nubas are pagans, only a



few who have come under Arab influence profess a kind of Islam. Although certain of their rites and ceremonies place them within the category of heathens, they, nevertheless, believe in a supreme God. This deity they call *Baal*, who is believed to reside in the heavens, but directs all earthly affairs through the medium of the spirits of the ancestors of each community. From the first inhabitants of each tribe, or hill, *Baal* is supposed to have chosen a number of spirits, which varies according to the size of the community, to watch over the affairs of their earthly descendants. These spirits are called *Arro*, and each tribe may possess one or a number of these unseen dictators of its destiny. In every case there is one or more female spirit.

The *Arro*, who dwell in some vague universe above the clouds, are believed to form a council, with a chief at their head. In some respects they correspond to the angels of the Christian faith, but their duties are more clearly defined, and they are believed to control even the smallest act in the life of each individual of the community over whose interests they are for ever watching. The *Arro* can give prosperity, fecundity, long life and happiness as a reward, or they can visit erring mortals with plague, barrenness or disease. Before they can act, however, they must send the chief *Arro* to obtain the permission of the god *Baal*, and this applies especially to the giving or taking of life.

The next world they consider to be a place of bliss,

where families are united and husbands, wives and lovers have unrestricted intercourse, but no children can be born of such heavenly marriages. They believe that the earth is a place of trial through which all life must pass to qualify for the elysium which comes after. Although death is the final expiation of all sin, and there is no hell, there are, nevertheless, spiritual planes or realms which vary according to earthly conduct. A curious belief is that each hill, or community, has a separate place allotted to it in the future existence, and it is for this reason that very little intercommunication or marriage beyond the circle of the tribe ever takes place. Only against a common enemy, or on the approach of danger, when one hill will signal to another by means of fires, is there any united action between one isolated group and another. In the same manner fecundity is considered of great importance in this life because no children can be born in the next, or they would escape passing through the period of trial, and a childless couple after death would have no earthly ties in which to interest themselves or live again. Here again we have the influence of religion on the customs of the Nuba, for the childless and even the unmarried have the first right to all orphans.

Every *Arro*, or guiding spirit, is represented on earth by a medium, whom, for lack of any other name, I will call by the Arabic title of *kujur*. The chief of these priests in every tribe is the earthly representative of the head *Arro*. In a few cases there is a



priestess, but this only occurs in the southern *jebels* where the religious beliefs have become somewhat debased. All *kujurs* act also as witch-doctors and rank next in importance to the Mek, or king of each tribe.

The remote ancestors of the Nubas are believed to have dwelt upon the banks of the Nile, in Nubia, and their *kujurs* are held to be the successors of the Priest-Kings of Ancient Egypt. It is certainly a most curious fact that emblems of their ritual still maintain both the shape and style of those in use thousands of years ago, as portrayed in the delicately coloured carvings of many temples and tombs. The more I saw of the Nubas and the deeper I studied their religious beliefs and customs, the greater became my conviction that they are the inheritors of the ages. Without wishing to touch upon such a controversial subject as spiritualism, about which I have but little knowledge, I could not help wondering, while in the Dar Nuba, whether I was actually upon the threshold of a great and far-reaching discovery. Is spiritualism the comparatively modern science often claimed, or was it the real foundation of the religion of Ancient Egypt, over 4000 years ago?

We now come to what is perhaps the most startling part of the present day religion of these queer people. The office of *kujur* is not in any way hereditary. On the death of one of these priests his successor is chosen through a trance, and therefore corresponds to what has become known to civilization as a medium. The

*kujurs'* trance is one of the most weird ceremonies I have ever witnessed. It takes place in public. Anyone of the tribe who feels that he is called to the priesthood can come forward for the trial ceremony. By starvation combined with will power he must throw himself into a trance, and the *Arro* will then take possession of the body or not as it considers fit. If the medium receives the spirit he first emits eerie shrieks and is then given a changed voice and an eloquence to address the assembled tribe. The Nubas believe that this combination could only be obtained by what is best described as inspiration. The new *kujur* is then installed with certain rites, which include the presentation of the iron-ringed and narrow-headed battle-axe of his predecessor. A procession to the *Arro's* house, during which he is supposed to be still in a state of trance and usually leans heavily on the assisting arm of the Mek—signifying royal support in the execution of his office—then takes place in front of the assembled tribe.

If it is afterwards proved that the trance was feigned, that the wisdom, eloquence and the changed voice and mien were only simulated, the would-be priest and tribal counsellor is disgraced, and can never again enter for the *kujurs'* trance. If, however, the spirit of the *Arro* refuses to take possession of the body offered, then it is considered that the temporal home was either mentally or physically unsuitable; but the act of making the offer is looked upon as piety, and the supplicant can at any time offer himself again for



the office of *kujur*. I was given to understand that very seldom does the spirit enter the body of a novice or a very young man.

There can be little doubt that during these ceremonies one or more of the applicants are unconscious, whether or not it is the hypnotic influence of the circle of onlookers combined with the exercise of will and starvation on the part of the *kujur* which produces the desired effect it is, of course, impossible to say without the conduct of a series of scientific tests, which it is unlikely these savages would tolerate. Curiously, however, all the *kujurs* whom I met seemed to have a vacant and almost supernatural stare. This may be due to the effect which the more or less frequent production of the semi-conscious state has upon the mentality and physique of the individual. The *kujurs* of a tribe are called upon to advise the Mek in all important matters. Their advice is frequently given in public while in the subconscious condition. So great is the influence of these priests that the offices of Mek and chief *kujur* are often combined in one person.

Apart from the purely superstitious customs and mere witchcraft, into which the old religion of the Nubas has degenerated in the *jebels* of the extreme south of the Dar, where these people have been brought for centuries into close contact with the heathen Nuers, Dinkas and, in a lesser degree, Shilluks, the medical practice of the *kujurs* includes a form of hypnotic suggestion, the application

of massage, bone-setting, suggestion and faith healing, in addition to the use of a number of herbal remedies.

In the case of a dispute the *kujur* is called upon to adjudicate between the parties concerned. The two most serious offences are murder and theft within the tribe or against a guest in sanctuary. In the former case the relatives of the victim either kill the assassin or require blood money from him or his relatives. When a theft takes place the people of the hill are summoned by the *kujur* who threatens the thief with manifold evils if the property is not restored within seven suns. When this order is not obeyed the trance is employed in the effort to discover the criminal, but it usually happens that the stolen goods are left by stealth in the deserted *Arro* house during the hours of darkness.

This building is erected in every village for the use of the spirit which represents that particular section of the community on each hill. Both food and drink are placed inside so that sustenance may be ready when the spirit moves on earth. The *Arro* house corresponds to the church of the Christian faith, and there is no other edifice of a religious character. Almost every Nuba appears to know the name not only of the *Arro* who is the guardian of his village, but also those of the villages of the whole tribe. It is perhaps more correct to say that the *kujur* is simply the medium through whom each *Arro* is supposed to speak to his earthly charges rather than to assume that



the spirit actually takes permanent possession of the body of the priest.

It is a curious fact that the Nuba considers relationship to be stronger through the male than the female line. Although the table of affinity is similar to that of civilized communities it differs in one important respect. A man can marry his first cousin providing she is the daughter of his mother's relations and not those of his father. In the same way the inheritance of Mekship is nearly always the son of the king's sister. In appearance the *kujurs* are usually tall, thin and ascetic looking, which is most unusual among African tribes. They carry either long-handled axes or staves, with iron rings round the handles, and are usually seen smoking peculiar pipes ornamented with iron. It is curious that gold is not employed for decoration either by the Mek or the *kujurs*, considering that it is known to exist in the Dar.

As already stated these priests bestow their blessing by spitting on the bare chest of the favoured one. This disgusting ceremony occurs frequently during the passing of a *kujur* through a village, and it is the custom of the people in every *tukl* visited first to offer the priest a drink of *merissa* or water. A similar ceremony is depicted on the walls of tombs in the Valley of the Kings, and, according to native tradition, supported by linguistic evidence, the ancestors of the present Nuba of Kordofan were the early inhabitants of Nubia, Dongola and a portion of Upper Egypt. They either formed part of, or were brought into close

contact with, those mysterious early civilizations which provided the marvellous temples and tombs extending from the Pyramids of Giza to the ruins of Meröe, the southern capital of ancient Ethiopia.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### The Spiritualistic Nubas

**T**HE Nuba law of sanctuary is remarkable because it forms such a distinct contrast to the custom of isolation, in both religious and tribal affairs, of one hill, or community, from its neighbours. A guest is provided with food and shelter in any Nuba household for as long as he cares to stay, and no payment or gift is accepted for this privilege. Should a guest in sanctuary be murdered during one of the frequent vendettas between one family, or hill, and another, he must be avenged in the same manner as if he was a near and dear relative, although it frequently happens that a guest comes from a far-off hill, and is quite unknown to anyone in the village in which he is temporarily residing.

Another even more unusual feature is that sanctuary must be given to any criminal who may claim it without regard to the hill from which he comes or the crime he may have committed. This law often brings upon the head of a peaceful family all the horrors of a blood-feud, because, according to tribal custom, the relatives of a victim must hunt down the assassin; if they cannot, or do not wish to obtain blood-money from his relatives; and those who have harboured

the murderer are compelled to protect or avenge him. Two families who are complete strangers to each other thus go to war over an acknowledged criminal. It is in this way that many of the feuds which exist among the Nubas and have been handed down from past generations, were either started or renewed.

Sanctuary, like the signal fires which can be seen at night transmitting from hill to hill the news of any unusual happening, appears to be one of the very few forms of cohesion between the many isolated communities of this queer race. There is, however, another link, which seems to have been borrowed from the Arab. This is the practice of blood-brotherhood, generally between the Nuba of different hills. The method is the usual one of mixing the blood obtained from cuts in the arm.

A Nuba may have as many wives as he can afford to maintain, but, as each one has to be purchased at a price varying, according to youth and beauty, from ten to fourteen head of cattle, the polygamous instincts of these savages have some kind of restriction placed upon them. It is the custom when a young Nuba wishes to marry for him to approach either the father or brother of the girl with regard to the payment expected for her. As with the Dinkas the bridegroom is permitted to begin conjugal relations with the bride on payment of a fourth of the purchase price, but the wife still continues to live in the hut of her parents until a child is born. When this event takes place, although, with the exception of the baptism



ceremony already described, no particular rites mark the birth either of a son or daughter, the husband must pay another quarter of the bride-price and take her to his own house. When the children of a marriage reach a certain age the final instalment is paid out of the price received for any daughters, or, if there are no female children, the sons must make it by hunting, fishing, cultivation, breeding or other work. When a wife dies childless the husband receives back half the cattle paid for her to enable him to make a fresh purchase. After the birth of a son the husband must cease to have intercourse with his wife for ten or twelve weeks, and in the case of a daughter for eight weeks.

The third most important event in the life of an individual is death, and among the Nubas this is marked by a feast and wailing among the relatives. The corpse is not buried immediately, because it is thought that the spirit hovers in the near vicinity to take a last look at its earthly dwelling and kin before departing into *Twala*, or the Nuba equivalent of heaven. When the time comes for burial (twenty-four hours after death) the corpse is interred in a reclining position on the right side. Later on I discovered that this custom only applies to the Dilling Jebels, for in the Nyima Range the custom is to bury the body in an upright or standing position.

Every Nuba *jebel* is honeycombed with caves in which are stored both food and water in large semi-circular earthenware pans for use in case of need.

These war supplies are continually being changed, and the work is carried out by the entire population on a day fixed by the *kujurs*. Although I was unable to proceed far into any of these dark subterranean passages it seemed that many of them not only penetrate the entire hill, but also have a number of branches leading from the top to the base, and even towards adjacent strongholds and the plains around. These caves are not entirely artificial. Many hills are simply a mass of boulders, and by removing the smaller rocks between the larger granite blocks a labyrinth of passages has been made which enables even cattle to be herded and hidden in the galleries. Portions are often open to the daylight and have terraces of cultivable soil near by, but these sections are usually in the more lofty and remote parts, and are carefully shielded by thick bush. On one occasion, near the plateau of Jebel Temain, I nearly fell into one of these cavities, and was only saved by my Nuba guide. In addition to these cave retreats many of the Nuba hills are carefully terraced for cultivation so that they can withstand an almost indefinite siege.

The arms of the Nuba comprise a number of old Remington rifles, relics of the day when many thousands of slaves, who had been compelled to fight in the armies of the Khalifa, ran back to their native hills with their arms on the defeat of this cruel despot at the Battle of Omdurman. For these weapons an inferior kind of ammunition is made locally from charcoal and saltpetre, which is obtained from the salt



deposits at Jebel Saburi, near Kadugli, and Jebel Tabuli, near Talodi. The sulphur, together with the caps, which are made of match-heads, have to be obtained by barter from the Arabs of the plains. Thousands of these hillmen are, however, armed only with a spear, having an iron, bone or even wooden head. The last two of these are usually poisoned, except for hunting. Raids and feuds between one hill and another are of common occurrence, especially among the outlying *jebels*.

In defence of his mountain stronghold the Nuba is a stubborn fighter, and the attacking force is usually subjected to such a hail of bullets, stones, boulders and spears from the cover of innumerable rocky ramparts and caves that only a strong and persistent enemy can hope to gain the summit. Even when this has been accomplished the Nubas retreat into their caves and a kind of guerilla warfare ensues, which, in the past, generally caused their Dervish invaders to beat a hasty retreat to the plains with any slaves and cattle they might have been able to collect. The Baggara have instilled into the Nubas such a dread of horsemen that they will not fight away from their own hills, and it is no uncommon occurrence to find walls, made of boulders, placed one on top of another, across the narrow valleys between these lofty strongholds.

In order to check the Arab slave raiders the people of the Koalib Hills, an isolated group in Lat.  $11^{\circ} 52' N.$ , and Long.  $30^{\circ} 46' E.$ , with Jebel Ambri as the most

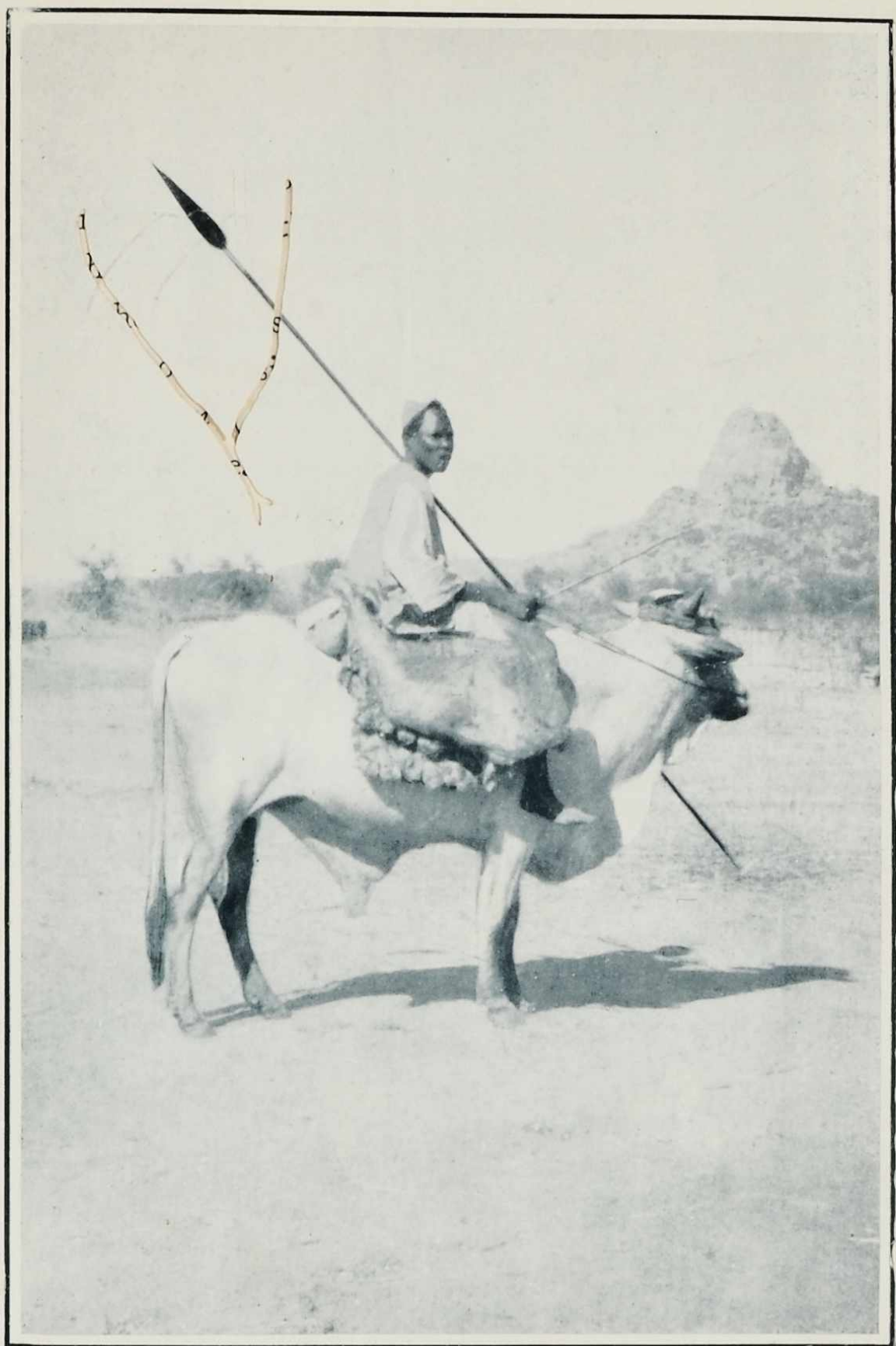
lofty point, introduced the tsetse fly and are now supposed to possess the power of making this dreaded insect appear wherever they desire. So far as I could discover the method employed is to fill a gourd with the blood of a newly killed domestic animal, and then to leave this trap-like arrangement in one of the fly-infected regions. When the tsetse enter the gourd to suck the blood they are unable to escape, and the gourd is conveyed to the *jebel* or camp of an enemy and is opened and left among his animals. It was while carrying into effect this diabolical method of warfare against the encroachments and sudden raids of the Arab horsemen of the plains that the whole of the Koalib group, whose 12,000 Nuba are among the most primitive of their kind, became infected with this highly dangerous pest. Each of these small and low *jebels*, the principal of which are Ambri and Murkr, curiously enough appears to be very thickly populated. Travelling through this group is attended with considerable risk, and has to be carried out on foot from the plains at a long distance from a base of supply. There is a local breed of cattle which is said to be immune to the tsetse fly, but these beasts are very little larger than a goat and are more than half wild.

After leaving Dilling and the Nyima Range I moved for about 10 miles in a south-easterly direction to a point between the *jebels* of Temain and Morun. Fortunately I soon obtained not only a guide, but also a friendly reception, after two hours' stiff climb in great heat, from the people in the first village on the



plateau, which, according to my aneroid, is just over 510 feet above the surrounding plain. Owing to the difficulty of this ascent neither camels or mules can be taken up, except by a long journey over Jebel Morun, but with the aid of three Nubas whom I discovered on a cultivated patch near the base I was able to get sufficient food and water to the summit to enable me to stay a day or two on this lofty plateau. Perhaps it was that I had become unduly heated by the long climb in a temperature of 98° F., but what astonished me most was the coolness of the air at an altitude which might be expected to make but little difference in a land so near to the equatorial zone.

Being at last established in a Nuba village I proceeded to make the best use of the opportunity afforded, knowing only too well that I could not long maintain the position with the small amount of food brought up from the plain below. Although, of course, Nuba villages vary considerably in both size and type, those on the almost flat summit of Jebel Temain accommodate about 200 to 300 people; but the huts, made of a mud which dries nearly as hard as concrete, and exceedingly well thatched, are huddled very close together. They have pointed roofs shaped like a bell and entrances in the circular walls cut in the form of a pear. A large *tebeldi* tree was used for the storage of water, a surprising fact when it is considered that the sandy plains of Northern Kordofan are the true



A BULL-RIDER OF THE DAR NUBA.

The girthless saddle is held in place by correct balance and the legs of the rider. The spear is 12ft. in length.



home of these trees. The dwelling of a family generally consists of two or more small huts, in one of which live all the wives and children, and in the other the male head of the household. A third hut is sometimes added either for the parents of the husband or other relatives. The cooking which is not carried on in the open usually takes place in the women's hut. The food consists of various dishes made from dhurra, *ful sudani* (earth nuts), milk and butter, but the Nubas also eat large numbers of guinea-fowl and rock pheasant, in addition to the flesh of bulls, sheep, goats, camels, pigs, dogs, monkeys and wild beasts. Animals who die in disease are invariably eaten. The liver and kidney, whenever possible, are devoured raw and often while still warm. Flies and locusts are covered with honey and eaten alive, while certain slugs which live in the crevices of the rock, and small non-poisonous snakes are considered a luxury. These people have very few cooking utensils, but dhurra and maize are stored in huge earthenware bowls. A similar pot of a somewhat smaller size seems to serve for a variety of culinary purposes.

In the villages on Jebel Temain, as in those of the Nyima Range, the Nuba men and girls wear no clothes at all, except perhaps a thin string of bright coloured beads round the neck and waist. Married women, however, use the long strip of cloth customary in the northern portions of the Dar. As I proceeded south this was exchanged for a bunch of leaves, giving the

women a most curious appearance. At this time I had not seen the almost fantastic dresses and ornaments used during their dances and wrestling matches.

Being unable to bring myself to drink the stagnant water from either the *tebeli* trees or the dirty wells, used by all the cattle, I was compelled to descend from the plateau of Temain on the morning of the third day. Not wishing to face the climb down during the hours of great heat I started with two guides, lent to me by the Mek—a most courteous old fellow—almost as soon as the sun rose in matchless splendour, tinting the bare rocks and trees with golden light. During the dry season the early morning on these hills is delightful. The air is cool without being cold, and the sunlight is undimmed by the faintest moisture either near the ground or in the upper air. Not the lightest zephyr disturbs the coarse grass, the trees or the perfect serenity of the ideal tropical morning. The plain around is bathed in yellow radiance, and other hills, jagged of outline, appear to be bluish-mauve patches on the turquoise sky.

When a quarter of the way down the hill-side I noticed a large number of the younger men from the villages above coming behind us, leaping from one boulder to another with wonderful agility. For a few moments I wondered the reason for this, thinking that perhaps they had regretted letting me depart so easily, but it soon transpired that they were a hunting party, coming down in search of leopards, kudu, *oribi*



and duiker. Before we had reached the lower slopes of the hill the 40 or 50 naked young athletes had caught up with us and were jabbering excitedly to the guides. Being keenly anxious to witness a Nuba hunt, for only two of them carried rifles, the remainder being armed with spears and bone knives, I did my best to explain this, and apparently with success, for no objection was made to my following them for over an hour and a half round the base of Jebel Morun towards the wooded and more open country to the south-west.

I was beginning to regret my decision to join in the chase as the heat of the morning increased, and it became no easy task to keep up, while at the same time preventing a nasty fall, with these fleet and sure-footed young Nuba. The advantage of bare, or specially sandalled feet on a boulder strewn hill-side cannot be overestimated. However, when a cleft appeared between the two *jebels*, the ground of which was covered with trees and bushes, they halted in a more or less open clearing and extended themselves into the form of a wide crescent. All talking ceased as they bounded quickly forward. It was only by running that I could keep within sight of the line of darting, springing black bodies. Unfortunately I had dropped a little behind when the first kill occurred. It was a young kudu, who leapt out from behind a ridge of rocks and almost instantly received a spear in its flank. It bounded away, but was caught by the extended

points of the crescent closing in. Then I saw that not one but two of these animals were within the circle of hunters. One man who was either a professional or amateur champion dashed out from the wide circle and literally ran the fleet-footed kudu to earth within the space of a little over 300 yards. Before the animal could turn to face its pursuer a spear had been thrust deep in behind the shoulder blade. The beast ran for a short distance, stumbled, recovered itself and then dropped panting on to its side. It was quickly dispatched by the hunters who had circled round. By this time the other wounded kudu had got into an awkward position between two rocky outcrops, but its career was soon ended by several spear thrusts from the top of one of the boulders.

I was about to turn back for the long march to camp, not wishing to be present at the carnivorous orgy which I expected would follow, when, to my astonishment, beyond cutting out the horns—a much more difficult task than might be supposed—the two carcasses were slung on long spears and the hunt was continued. The heat made this kind of work impossible without danger of sunstroke for a fully clothed and booted white man, and I regretfully turned back with my two guides. The horns of this animal are evidently the prized trophies of the hunter who gives the *coup de grâce*, while the flesh is divided equally between the whole party. On a later occasion I saw kudu horns used in a most ingenious manner.



That night I suffered great irritation on the legs and feet. Exactly what the insect was that caused it, or whether it was due to some irritating or poisonous grass, I have never been able to discover, but a change of garments and a wash in a strong solution of Lysol saved me from further trouble. On the following day I was informed by one of the Nubas that a dance was to be held in a village away to the south on the succeeding morning, and, moreover, that as he came from the *jebel* on which it was to take place there would be no difficulty in my being present. How news of this character is circulated presents something of a problem, because, unless he had learned it from the hunting party, or in the village on Jebel Temain, I can think of no way in which the information could have reached our camp. At first I thought of questioning him on this point, in case of treachery, but a conversation carried on with half a dozen words of Arabic and an equal number in English and Nuba soon becomes wearisome, because lengthy signs and drawings are necessary to supplement the meagre vocabulary, and I soon gave it up in despair.

By moving off early on the following morning we reached the *jebel* in question about four hours after sunrise. When camp had been made we ascended to a village on a slope less than 150 feet high. Unfortunately I could not find the exact name of this hill on any map in my possession, but, from the direction and distance, I knew that it must be one of the Gulud

group. What I saw that day and during part of the following night of a Nuba festival makes me believe that there is no more curious or barbaric sight to be witnessed to-day in the whole length and breadth of the Dark Continent.



## CHAPTER XIX

### Barbaric Scenes

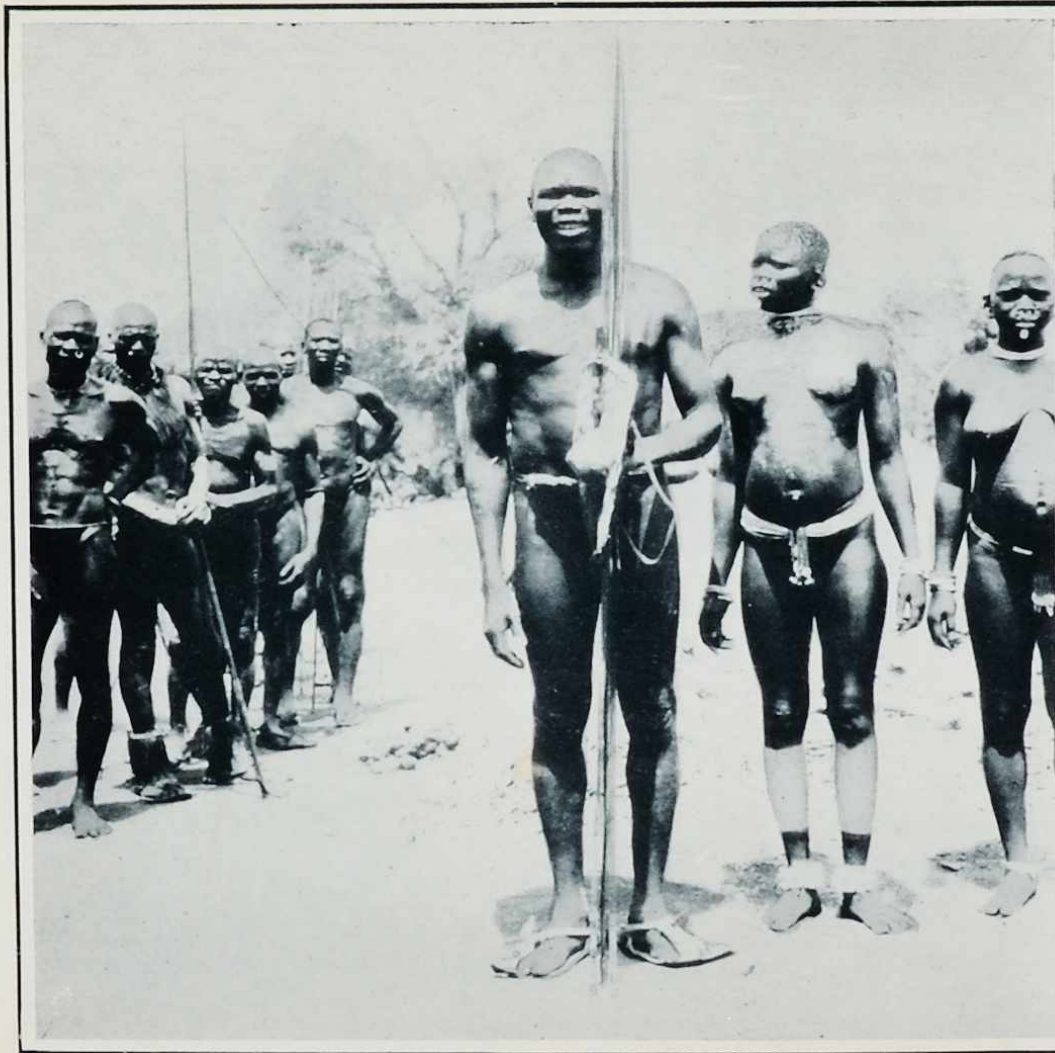
**B**ARBARIC in the extreme was the sight which greeted us on emerging from among the immense boulders and sparse, dried-up and almost leafless trees into the village on the lower slopes of Jebel Gulud. The wailing of weird instruments and the rhythmic beat of the tom-toms had been heard far down the difficult although by no means steep path. I had tried hard to take some bearings which would enable me to find the way back, alone if necessary, on to the open plain. So tortuous was the trail, however, and so little was there to mark the turns in the almost invisible track between the immense piles of rock, that I was forced, much against my better judgment, to give it up in disgust, and so place myself unreservedly in the hands of the already excited guide and the unknown quantity beyond.

There was nothing unusual in the village itself, which consisted of a number of *tukls*, not so well built as those of Dilling, Nyima or even Temain, among the granite boulders, the coarse grass and the stunted trees. These huts half encircled a clearing which was shielded on all sides by immense piles of rock. It was the two or three hundred naked, painted, feathered

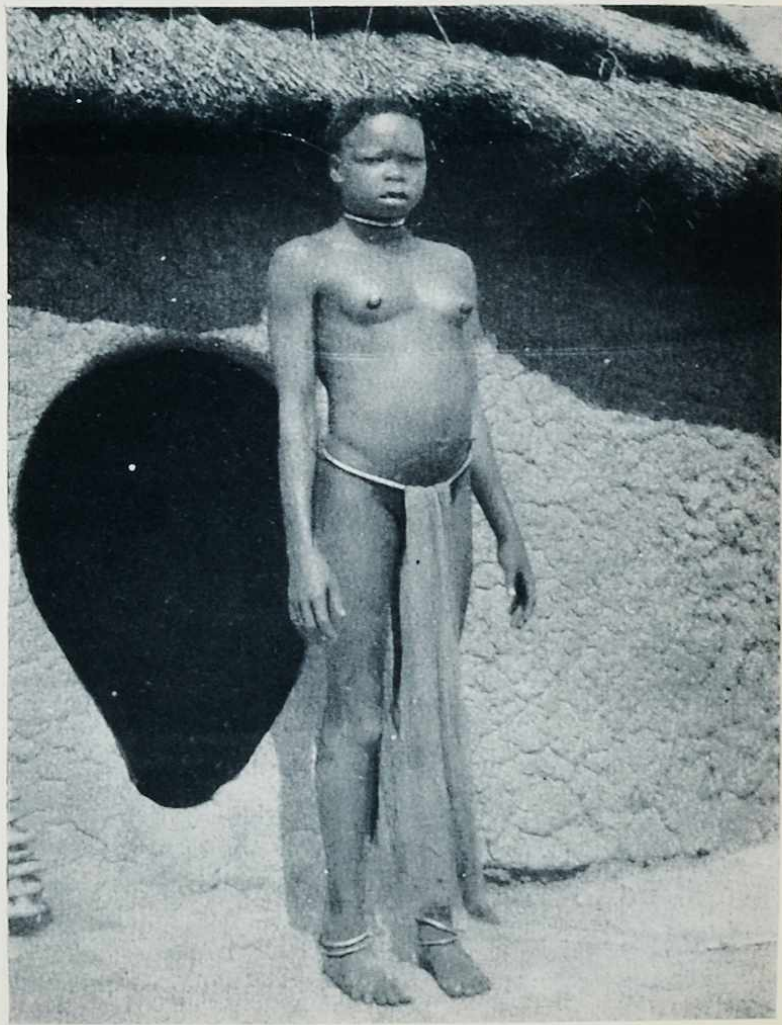
and otherwise ornamented men, women and children, which provided the never-to-be-forgotten sight of savage Nubaland.

For some minutes I could not take my eyes from the scene to examine more closely its component parts. Hitherto I had watched these hill people in their everyday undress going soberly about their common tasks, but here, at last, was the ideal setting, rich in both colour and form, for a great Academy picture of barbarism. White ivory gleamed in the brilliant sunlight on blue-black, satin-like skin. Ostrich feather head-dresses rose and fell as the tall wearers moved about the clearing. Elaborate bead necklaces and waistbelts showed to advantage against the marvellous symmetry of naked limbs. Giant men, weirdly daubed with paint and muffled in capes of fur, stood head and shoulders above the throng. In one corner, leaning against a boulder, were a number of women spotted to represent human leopards. *Kujurs*, in flowing white *gallabias*, passed from place to place directing operations with their long thin battle-axes. Children, with bandoliers supporting cow-bells, jingled as they ran and danced in a pandemonium of excitement. Youths lashed themselves with heavy hide whips until blood trickled down their nude bodies before groups of admiring damsels clothed only in beads. A forest of tall dancing sticks of white, brown, blue and red, appeared everywhere, while the sunlight flashed on the highly polished blades of innumerable 12-foot spears. These were a few of the disjointed impres-





A NUBA WARRIOR AND HIS TWO WIVES. He was over 7ft. in height. He carries the small shield used in mountain warfare, and is wearing the Nuba form of sandal. The legs of his favourite wife are decorated with white paint.



A NUBA GIRL ON JEBEL ELIRI. The long apron is worn by married women. To be pigeon-toed is an attraction. The hut is constructed of a mud which dries hard. The entrance is closed by a lattice-work door.

sions, taken from notes in my rough diary, which I received of this Nuba village preparing for a day of carnival in the saucer-like depression near the base of the Gulud *jebels*.

Over all the weird, Bacchanalian scene there arose the chattering of some two hundred excited savages, the reverberating beat of the war-drums, the uncanny wail of curious string instruments and short blasts from kudu-horn bugles. So dry was the air and the ground that the blazing sunlight caused the scene to flicker. It was one of those rare moments in life when every nerve and sense receives the thrill of novelty. I moved forward into the excited, perspiring, reeking throng strangely stirred.

Closer investigation revealed some extraordinary sights. One young giant had long feather tails and a mane of camel's hair. The turban of the Mek was surmounted by ostrich feathers, while one of the wives of this potentate wore only an elaborate collarette and corset made of string upon string of coloured beads. Down the centre of her body and round the arms were broad painted stripes. The fashion in waistbelts among the dancing girls was a broad check, but the coarse cotton cloth made locally seemed at a discount compared with the closely hand-woven bead embroidery. Everything that was bright or colourful had been used to contrast with the ebony skins of this bizzare assembly. Perhaps the most noticeable thing was the good temper of both old and young. Even the children had ceased to quarrel, and smiling black



faces with protruding lips were everywhere to be seen. I learned that the Nubas of these hills are friendly disposed towards the white man, but feared the Arab because, in the past, they had suffered so much at his hands. The Gulud villages, being built nearer to the base of the hills than those of many other tribes, owing to the peculiar configuration of the ground, had been less able to offer any effectual resistance to the wild Baggara horsemen.

After about an hour there was a sudden staccato drumming on the tom-toms, and almost instantly a wide space was cleared. I turned round to enquire of the guide what was about to happen and found that he was nowhere to be seen. No doubt the charms of dusky beauty or, more probably, the huge jars of *merissa* standing near the *tukl* of the Mek, had lured him irresistibly from the strict path of duty. A line of young men now rushed into the open space and threw their spears with so much vigour that several came uncomfortably close to where I was standing. It was then that I received the first intimation that instead of my presence being resented it was considered an honour. A space round where I stood had been cleared, and two huge guards, who made me feel uncomfortably insignificant, had been posted on each side. Immensely relieved by this spontaneous sign of goodwill, but somewhat perturbed by the problem of how best to repay the courtesy, I was free to enjoy the novel and barbaric entertainment. Rush after rush was made by batches of young warriors, and for

a moment after each advance the air was thick with flying spears.

It was not until this sport began to grow wearisome, which it very quickly does to the onlooker, however exciting it may be to the simple-minded but savage participants, that I discovered the purpose of this seemingly wanton expenditure of energy in the stifling heat and dust. Among each group there was one muscular giant evidently the champion spear-thrower, who, in order to retain the leadership of each grade, must apparently show the whole tribe that he can hurl his weapon far beyond the place reached by all others. After an hour of this—during which time I frequently made signs to my bodyguard that what I desired most was something to sit on, but apparently they considered that there was nothing the matter with the ground—the champion spearmen met in open competition. The nasty-looking weapons of their subordinates having come within a few yards I awaited the new onrush with an uncomfortable feeling that if any of them won fresh laurels it would probably be at my expense.

However, the competition proved to be an entirely different one. This time it was aim rather than distance which was evidently the object. A log of wood about the size of a man's body devoid of head, legs and arms, was placed upright on the ground. Each man in turn threw a long steel-bladed spear, and, to my surprise, the number who missed was about equal to those who hit this target. Becoming desperate



at having to stand for so long in the scorching heat, I made a last effort to obtain a seat. On turning round, after carefully making up my mind as to how best to describe the simple appliance needed, I discovered my erring guide being firmly held by one of the guards. After a few words to the point, which I am not sure whether he understood or not, as *merissa* was trickling down the corners of his mouth, I shook him and explained what I wanted, much to the amusement of the black and grinning circle around.

Almost instantly I was supplied with a small three-legged stool, having a cup-shaped seat. Once down into this low pot-like arrangement only an unbecoming scramble would place me on my feet again. However, after climbing over rocks and standing from sunrise to midday in a temperature which, perhaps fortunately, I could only guess to be well over 100° F., it was worth the risk of losing dignity, an asset of great importance among savages.

Again the war-drums rattled. A line of girls, so close together, one behind the other, as to resemble a black snake, and keeping perfect line and step, walked into the centre of the admiring circle. The low sound of voices and weird string instruments rose and fell in melody and rhythm quite unusual among savage races. The steps of the dancers consisted either of a quick walk or a very slow shuffle, in response to the low beating of the tom-toms and the eerie music. I could discover little purpose or beauty in this first dance. The naked bodies were pressed so



THE SUN DANCE OF THE NUBAS.

ASSEMBLING FOR THE DANCE. Note the dancing sticks.

THE SCENE IN THE VILLAGE. All the Nuba youth and beauty have answered to the call of the war-drums, which can be seen in the centre of the picture. Note the check tail-piece of one village belle.

THE BEGINNING OF THE GREAT DANCE. The bodies of the girls are pressed close together. The line then moves forward at a sharp, jolting trot, winding like a snake.



close together as to resemble a single black mass with the legs of a centipede which moved with automatic regularity in a series of gyrations round the cleared space. Some of the legs of the dancers were covered with white spots, and the leader of the line carried a tall stick in each hand. To me it appeared to be more a physical exercise than a dance, and this was increased when, just before the end, the whole line sank slowly down and hopped along the ground evidently in representation of a lizard or scorpion.

The Nubas are apparently very fond of dancing, because they received this curious exhibition with such wild shrieks of joy as to drown the singing and all else except the din of the war-drums. When the first part of this performance was over great bowls of *merissa* were produced, together with smaller dishes of roasted ground nuts. The men drank one after another from the same bowl until its contents were exhausted, but the women and children scooped up the liquid in smaller utensils which had all the appearance of shells. I had the greatest possible difficulty in persuading my hosts that I was neither thirsty nor hungry, and this was not to be wondered at considering the heat and dust, and that my throat and lips were really so parched that I could scarcely smoke.

My principal disadvantage in similar situations elsewhere has always been an ultra-sensitiveness with regard to food and drink. Unlike many explorers and travellers I have never been able to overcome the

nausea caused by messy and often disgustingly dirty native dishes and intoxicants. The disadvantages are obvious, but at the same time there is the indisputable fact that a savage can eat and drink that which would kill the average European. One often sees these people drinking from stagnant pools, eating putrid fish and flesh, devouring raw the intestines of animals and relishing dishes of repulsive insects and reptiles. I have yet to receive evidence that the same bill of fare would not render a white man *hors de combat* within a day or so.

While the excitement was at its height, however, I managed to slip behind a pile of rocks to the rear of the "Grand Stand," and obtain a drink from my water-bottle, but the food packed carefully in a haversack had to remain there for the time being. The next was a mixed dance, and consisted of a swaying line of men advancing towards a row of girls simulating reluctance to join their partners. Then began a series of contortions of the body by the men, which seemed to represent an exaggerated form of love-making and pretence. Finally each girl in turn yielded to the seductive advances of her admirer, and, amid shrieks of joy from the crowd, joined in a frenzied dance which appeared to be merely symbolic of happiness attained. The only noteworthy point was the length of time during which these dances were kept going without even a minute's rest or breathing space. The children among the watching tribe appeared to be as deeply interested as their elders, which is certainly to



be wondered at considering that most of them had either become sleepy or quarrelsome with the *merissa* which they had been given.

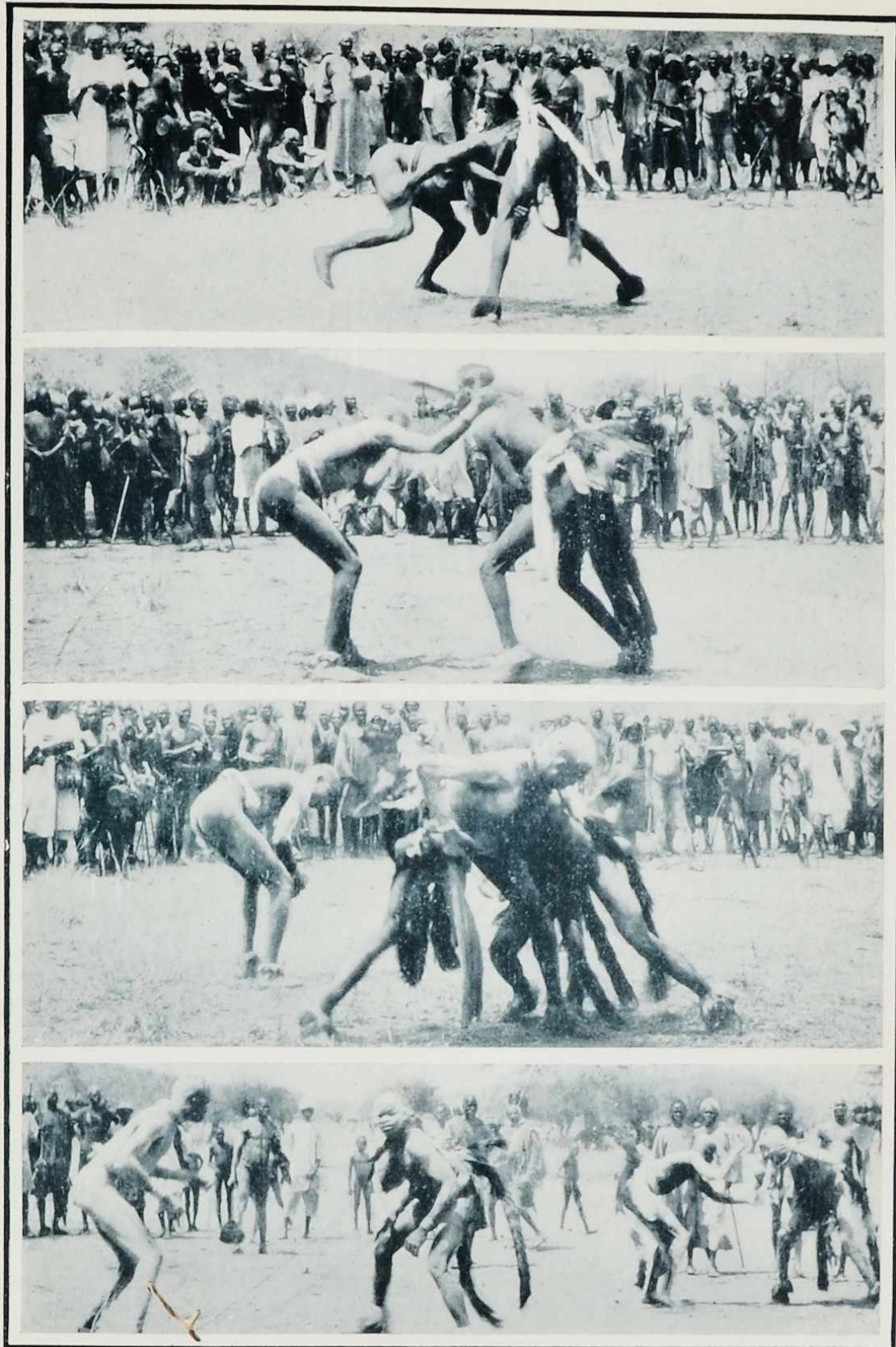
It was sundown before these dances came to an end, and when the purple shadows began to creep among the boulders and trees I concluded that the day's amusement was over. The air was now deliciously cool and the sky in the west a faint ethereal pink as of light coming up from behind the world. Distant *jebels* were masses of mauve and yellow, for their summits still caught the fires of the dying African day. Here and there in the village, now enshrouded by the film-like shadows of early evening, a fire had been lighted, and around the spluttering flames from green but bone-dry wood naked figures crouched as they drank. The tom-toms had ceased their ominous beat, the wailing had died away, and a peculiar hush brooded over this little savage community.

After searching for some minutes I discovered my guide, only to learn that there was "much big dance" on the rising of the moon. With this intelligence I departed behind a pile of rocks, found a convenient place, and opened up my haversack for a meal. This event greatly interested the Nuba children around, who could not, however, be persuaded to sample even a biscuit. After I had been there a few minutes the Mek came with the guide and invited me to a conference outside his *tukl*. Apparently the Nuba have no means of lighting the interior of their dwellings during the hours of darkness, and so we sat on stools outside

the pear-shaped entrance before a blazing fire, although the night was by no means cold.

From the Mek I tried to learn something of Nuba history, but beyond the information that, according to tradition, his people came from the north and spoke the same language as those of Jebel Katla, by whom they had been raided in past years, nothing of importance was forthcoming, and I turned the conversation on to a subject which had been puzzling me throughout the day. This old chief, who had once been a slave, told me that the Nuba youths lashed themselves until their bodies streamed with blood in order to show their stoicism and bravery to the women of the tribe, so that they may find favour when buying the first wife. What I had seen of this self-torture on entering the village was, however, an unrehearsed event due to the excitement of the moment. The festival in which it is the custom takes place towards the end of the rainy season. During the fifteen days before the full moon they lash themselves with hide whips every night in front of the whole tribe. It is during these ordeals that the young women appraise the worth of the eligible youths of the village. Before leaving this old chief he had promised that if I returned to his village he would let me see some Nuba wrestling. Although a favourite sport of the people of all the *jebels* the southern hills are considered to produce the best wrestlers. Inter-village matches are held, and in these the Nuba of the Krongo Hills usually come off the best.





### NUBA WRESTLING.

**SECURING A HOLD.** The bodies of these giants are covered with grease and a hold can only be secured by digging the fingers deep into the flesh.

**GROTESQUE FEATHER TAILS.** The competitors are completely naked except for the tails worn by winners of previous matches.

**THE SHAVEN HEADS OF THE COMPETITORS.** The heads are shaven to prevent an unfair hold on the hair.

**MANŒUVRING FOR A HOLD.** Owing to their bodies being greased, the fingers are extended ready to be plunged into the flesh.



On returning to the cleared space in the centre of the village I found the moon already rising over a distant jagged line of hills, and the now weird revels in full swing. This time the entire village joined in. Men, women and even children danced in lines and circles with wild abandon. The war-drums were beaten more fiercely and the wailing and singing increased in volume. No sooner was one party exhausted than another, fired by copious draughts of *merissa*, was ready to take its place. What appeared crude and barbaric in the glaring light of the tropical day now seemed weird and mysterious. All there was of sensuality among this naked, dancing throng appeared openly on the surface, and the *merissa* seemed rather to increase the good temper of these really fierce hillmen. At one moment during the dance a young girl appeared on the summit of a boulder, her slim body outlined against the luminous blueness of the night sky. All movement ceased, and then suddenly she began to chant and the tom-toms beat slowly. Others joined in, raising their right hand and lowering it in unison with the weird music. It was the Moon Song of the Nuba, a curious pagan homage to the giver of light in darkness.

Never once was I left without a stalwart ebony guard, whom I could scarcely distinguish in the pale mysterious light of the young tropical moon. It now became evident that the men had been given this duty by the Mek. These Nuba revels often last throughout the night, and, consequently, as I desired to make an



early start on the following morning, we passed unnoticed out of the hospitable village as soon as there was sufficient light to make possible a return by the difficult trail to the camp, some four miles away. We were still escorted by the two silent guards until the open plain stretched away, rock and bush-covered, in the soft misty radiance of the tropical night.

## CHAPTER XX

### Savage Wrestlers

**B**EING completely naked and consequently without pockets, the Nuba of several hills, especially those of the Moro Range, have a most curious way of carrying a small supply of essential food when out on a long hunting trip. Before returning to the Gulud village for the wrestling match arranged for my benefit we made a wide reconnaissance to the south-east, on the opposite side of the track leading to the Kadugli Post, and were skirting the forested slopes of a low hill when we came suddenly upon a small party of hunters with the most extraordinary head-dress I have ever seen.

It appeared to be a series of white sausage-like curls all over the head, but on closer inspection and enquiry it was discovered to consist of butter and maize flour, made into rolls formed round wisps of hair. The drying action of the hot sun hardens the crust and leaves the inside of these rolls quite moist and doughy. By forming them round a number of hairs to which they cling tenaciously, food is carried without difficulty. When required, one or more of these white curls are pulled away from the hair of the head and eaten either raw or baked in an oven made of hot stones.



By this ingenious although somewhat repugnant method—for the rolls seldom remain clean and white for any length of time—these hunters have their hands and bodies left entirely free for the chase. Practically nothing is carried, except the long hunting spears and sometimes rifles with the crude ammunition made locally. The shallow *khors* and lakes, which in the south still contain water from the rainy season (April to September), can be crossed without fear of wetting clothes and spoiling supplies.

Occasionally hollow nuts, filled with grease for both eating and cooking, are also tied to the hair by grass, and at times are slung under the arm-pits by thongs over the shoulder. In these and other similar ways the Nuba make themselves into the most mobile hunters and fighters known. Nevertheless they still retain, and not without cause, such a dread of the fierce Arab horsemen of the plains around that they seldom venture very far from the protection afforded by their native hills.

Although in the northern portion of the Dar practically no fishing is done because of the absence of either rivers or lakes during the dry season, in the east-central and southern regions large numbers of fish are speared in the *khors* and ponds when the water collected in them during the rains has been rendered sufficiently shallow for operations to be carried on. This usually takes place in March, before the beginning of the electric storms which precede the tropical downpours.

The *modus operandi* is for about a hundred or more Nubas to form into two lines, extending from shore to shore; those in the first rank are armed with barbed fishing spears, while those in the second have nets made of grass fibre. These lines advance completely across a lake or for many miles up a *khor*, moving always against the stream. Those in the front rank spear the fish in the shallow water, seldom more than 2 or 3 feet deep, while the rear line collects the catches in the nets. The Nuba have no canoes or rafts, but these amphibious operations are carried on from sunrise to sunset, and it generally happens that each man engaged has some ten or twenty fish to show for his day's work.

Some of the best fishermen are found on Jebel Kanga, about 22 miles west of the Kadugli Post, and the scene of their operations is Lake Keilak, a few miles further to the south. This lake, during the rainy season, is about 6 miles long and 2 miles broad, but shrinks very considerably as the dry months pass by. It is fed by three large *khors* which rise in the vicinity of Jebels Tuleshi and Gulud, not far from the village to which I was to return for the Nuba wrestling. Keilak is surrounded by thick grass, and contains large numbers of fish, mainly, however, of two varieties.

When sufficient quantities of fish have been obtained they are split open and laid on boulders to dry in the tropical sun, but are often eaten in a semi-putrid condition when mixed with dhurra and milk. Another favourite fishing-ground of the Nuba is Khor Nueila,



when this sheet of water is not too thickly populated with nomadic Arabs and their herds.

The people of the southern hills, bordering the Dar Homr, were at one time great elephant hunters. The usual method was to encircle a herd and then concentrate the fire of their old Remington rifles on one or two of the nearest beasts. These elephant hunts generally ended in a sea of gore, but, during recent years, have become much less frequent owing to these mighty animals being very scarce all over Southern and Western Kordofan, due to their wholesale slaughter by the Messeria tribe. A few Nuba in the extreme southwest have copied from the Arabs the method of riding down the giraffe on horseback and killing it with spears as it runs, but in the majority of cases this animal is hunted and despatched by arranging a trap which cuts the hamstrings.

On the second day after our return to the camp near Jebel Gulud the village among the boulders was again *en fête*, this time for the promised wrestling match. The strongest young men in each community are properly trained for this manly sport, and they often develop quite unusual physique, as a glance at some of the accompanying illustrations will show. One village then challenges another, each putting into the ring some ten or fifteen wrestlers. The style is catch-as-catch-can, and the matches take place in the presence of a big and enthusiastic crowd of Nuba from all the villages around. Generally speaking, these contests are conducted with absolute fairness,



without regard to the place in which the match is held.

Although as an organized sport wrestling is more or less confined to the southern ranges, some of the *jebels* in the centre and north of the country produce some extraordinarily muscular and skilful fighters. Perhaps one of the most noteworthy facts about Nuba wrestling is the control which both sides exercise over their more savage instincts. It very seldom occurs that one of the opponents is killed, or that trouble is started between factions among the onlooking tribesmen, who, it must be remembered, are seldom without arms ready to hand. Broken limbs and sprains are, however, frequent, and the Nubas bind their wrists and often their legs to minimize the risk of these bones cracking under the tremendous strain which these muscular giants are able to put forth and endure.

On the afternoon set for the contest the clearing between the *tukls* was filled with the usual throng in their everyday undress. Only the competitors, huge negroes with greased bodies, were distinguished by long fur and feather tails and anklets, giving them the appearance of gigantic birds or animals. Except for these curious decorations they were completely naked, with their heads shaven to prevent any hold being secured on the hair. About four o'clock in the afternoon, after the heat of the day was over, a space was cleared, and in response to the usual beating of the tom-tom by the old Mek the contestants and their umpires filed into the improvised ring.



I was surprised to observe that several matches were to take place at the same time. As each pair leaned forward and manœuvred for position their tails of fur and feathers rose up behind them and, together with their extended claw-like fingers, gave the scene the grotesque appearance of a fight between a number of monstrous prehistoric birds. Then one long muscular arm darted out and the extended fingers secured a grip on the greasy body in front of it. In a moment the two ebony giants were locked in an embrace which would have killed any ordinary white man.

Viewing each little group separately without its background of eager and excited savages, called vividly to mind the scenes often depicted of barbarian wrestlers in the amphitheatres of ancient Rome. The blue-black shining bodies with muscles standing out in great cords and ridges, on arms, legs, neck and back, made these giant fighters, several of whom were nearly seven feet tall, appear to be the embodiment of brute strength. There was all the savagery of primitive man behind the few tribal restrictions, and blood trickled from patches of skin torn off by the pressure of the fingers which were dug in deeply to secure a hold on the greasy body.

There was a wild shriek from the tribesmen around as one huge competitor was hurled sideways to the ground by an opponent who appeared to be physically inferior. Apparently these wild men recognize that once they have been thrown down they are defeated. There would be no quarter in a real fight, and



consequently they allow none in their favourite sport. When the unfortunate competitor, who seemed none the worse for his apparently awful fall, retreated from the arena, he was greeted by an outburst of what I wrongly took to be good-natured jeers.

When one of the competitors in each of the four matches taking place simultaneously had either been hurled to the ground with varying degrees of violence or else become locked in what was evidently considered to be a death-grip, the victors competed among themselves for the championship. It is impossible adequately to describe these exciting contests between black supermen, trained from childhood for fighting, wrestling and the chase. Only the strongest in each village are allowed to compete, and therefore both victors and vanquished on this memorable afternoon represented the pick of the Nuba men in the vicinity of Jebel Gulud. However backward they may be mentally and from the civilized standpoint, they certainly are wonderfully fine physical specimens of humanity.

The only inducement offered to competitors in these inter-village matches appears to be the local renown obtained by the victors, although the community among whom each contest takes place usually provides a feast and a plentiful supply of *merissa*. Among the watching tribesmen I noticed a number standing in the same manner as the Shilluks and Dinkas. While leaning sideways against a long stick they rest the right leg by raising it and placing the



foot on the left knee, reversing the position when the left limb becomes tired. In this curious way they are able to stand without any apparent fatigue for hours at a time. The champion wrestlers in these contests were, curiously enough, not fêted by the people of the village because it is considered that they are above praise. On the other hand, it is the custom of these queer natives to applaud the efforts of those who have made the best stand against the established champion of the day. I questioned the Mek on this point, and was told that the purpose of this custom is to encourage the Nuba youth to compete against the best wrestlers, who usually make themselves the leaders of the young men of their respective villages.

On the following morning we started on the long journey back to El Obeid. Before leaving the Dar Nuba, however, we had a foretaste of the rainy season in the most appalling storm that I can remember. A photographic plate exposed while the storm was at its height showed four separate flashes of fork lightning, running from horizon to zenith. The presence of a considerable quantity of iron in the Nuba Hills, especially in the extreme south, may have some attraction for the electrical discharges, but we happened to be in a tree and bush-covered portion of the plain when the storm burst overhead, and two of the surrounding trunks were splintered by the lightning in the near vicinity before we reached more open country.

Despite the almost frantic plunging of the camels

we succeeded eventually in making camp, but sleep was out of the question for the first few hours of the night. Although the thunder was of exceptional violence and seemed to echo and re-echo from the surrounding hills, comparatively little rain fell, and the storm passed almost as quickly as it came, leaving behind a certain cool dampness in the air which proved remarkably refreshing after the scorching dry heat of the past weeks. These storms are the sure precursor of the rainy season, and it soon became evident that I had turned north only just in time to avoid the deluges which transform the numerous *khors* and depressions into rushing torrents and vast swamps.

During the rainy season in the Dar Nuba the only form of transport possible in the central and southern regions is by bull-cart, and even with these powerful and patient animals the swampy nature of the ground makes progress extremely slow. Speaking to a party of Nuba on the day after this storm I was told that *Baal* had come to earth in the lightning, and as no man, except the *kujurs*, may see his countenance, the Nuba of the surrounding *jebels* had retired into their subterranean caves. Here also I learned that almost pure iron occurs on the surface of an open plain to the south-west of Jebel Eliri. It is worked by the Nubas of the Krongo Range, who carry the ore in baskets to a crude mud furnace, where it is turned into bullets and spear-heads. These are bartered with the people of other hills for cattle, sheep, goats, and especially dhurra and maize. The charcoal made from a certain



tree which grows near the smelter is said to be much the best.

Day followed day with monotonous regularity. Slowly the camels plodded north-east towards civilization. The *jebels* of the Dar Nuba faded into the mirage and the black plains merged into the sandy wastes of Kordofan. During the long quiet evenings spent in camp amid the wonderful silence of the desert, with my mind free from the doubts and difficulties inevitable when travelling across unknown or little known lands, there was plenty of time to review the labours of the past months. The work which I had set out to accomplish was completed, not perhaps exactly in the manner planned, but what expedition, either large or small, has ever succeeded in attaining all that was hoped. The months of labour, often under a fierce tropical sun, the anxiety, known only to those who wander far from the beaten tracks of travel into the wide and wild open spaces of the world, the illness, caused as much by hardship as the severity of the climate, and the danger, both real and imaginary, had not been without avail. I had penetrated south into the heart of the great African swamps for over 3000 miles, journeyed east towards the little known wilds of the Abyssinian frontier and west towards the great Congo, while in the north, amid the Nuba Mountains, I had lived among the most curious native race ever encountered during eighteen years of almost continuous exploration and travel. In the course of these wanderings a mass of information had

been accumulated concerning the little known lands and peoples forming a large portion of the Darkest Africa of to-day.

The study of new races of mankind, the filling in of blank spaces on the map, however small these may be, is a labour of love which brings its own reward. Only in the great world beyond the pale of civilization does man realize the smallness of his endeavours and the pettiness of his achievements. Whether it was the uncanny stillness of the great plains around or physical weakness due to the reaction following long-sustained efforts in the heat and damp of the southern swamps I am unable to say, but never before have I found myself approaching the haunts of civilized man with such a strange longing for companionship. I even visualized the dinners in Khartoum and on the liner which would carry me home. Then my thoughts wandered from the African "blue" to the Amazonian wilds, where I had spent so much time during past years. I tried to compare the two, to look into the far-distant future when both these wild lands would be developed and peopled with new races of widely differing aims and ambitions, much as the old pioneers of the American West must have speculated upon the time when the civilization which they represented would displace the Redskin and the buffalo.

There was, however, no basis for comparison. Equatorial America is a vast country covered with almost impenetrable forest, but sparsely populated with races of mankind who have not yet reached the



Stone Age, while Equatorial Africa is a land of variety—vast deserts, swamps, forests, grass plains, big game lands, and curious mountains—inhabited by thousands of queer people, both brown and black. In the former region the barrier which forever lies across the pathway of the explorer is the two million square miles of almost impenetrable forest. In the latter the difficulties if not now quite as great are certainly more diverse. There are scarcely twenty square leagues without a native tribe, some of whom are friendly, others indifferent and a few are still openly hostile. Around the seaboard of Africa, as along that of South America, there is a fringe of civilization which every pioneer carries a yard or a mile towards the still savage centre. To imagine that because the atlas shows a number of names scattered over the enormous areas of these two continents they are civilized and tamed, that because here and there a plucky Government official resides in the midst of wild tribes, it must necessarily be that barbarism ceases for thousands of square miles around, is the all too prevalent misconception obtained from a geographical knowledge drawn from text-books rather than from travel. It leads the statesman and politician into inexcusable and ridiculous blunders, the business man into unnecessary losses and the traveller into many avoidable hardships.

The Kordofan Desert, on which these lines are written, has already been marked as the route by which the railway from Cairo to the Cape will strike south from El Obeid, crossing the Dar Nuba and going



westwards round the great swamps of the Ghazal on its way to the states of the Union. Here also the main, north to south, line will be joined by a new transcontinental system, running from east to west. Port Sudan on the Red Sea is already connected with El Obeid, a distance of nearly 1000 miles. This line will eventually be continued to the shores of Lake Chad, where a junction will be effected with the railway from Lagos, in Nigeria. The wild lands that we have visited and the savage tribes which we have known, what will become of them when the armies of civilization march across their frontiers, replacing their wild game with domestic herds, and bringing them face to face with the problems of a civilized epoch? Time and distance are, however, the enemies of rapid progress, and for many years to come the great dead heart of the Black Sudan will remain undisturbed in its primordial sleep.

At El Obeid my little caravan was soon dispersed, with genuine feelings of regret on all sides. Some went back to their beloved Nuba Mountains, and others, with their camels again laden, headed into the heart of the desert sunset. After remaining at Khartoum for a short time as the guest of the Government I crossed the picturesque hills to Port Sudan. From this rapidly growing maritime centre I visited the old slave port of Suakin, a glittering and typically Eastern gem in the sapphire-blue of the Red Sea, and left the old palace of this town, in which no white man now resides, for the ship, the sea and home.



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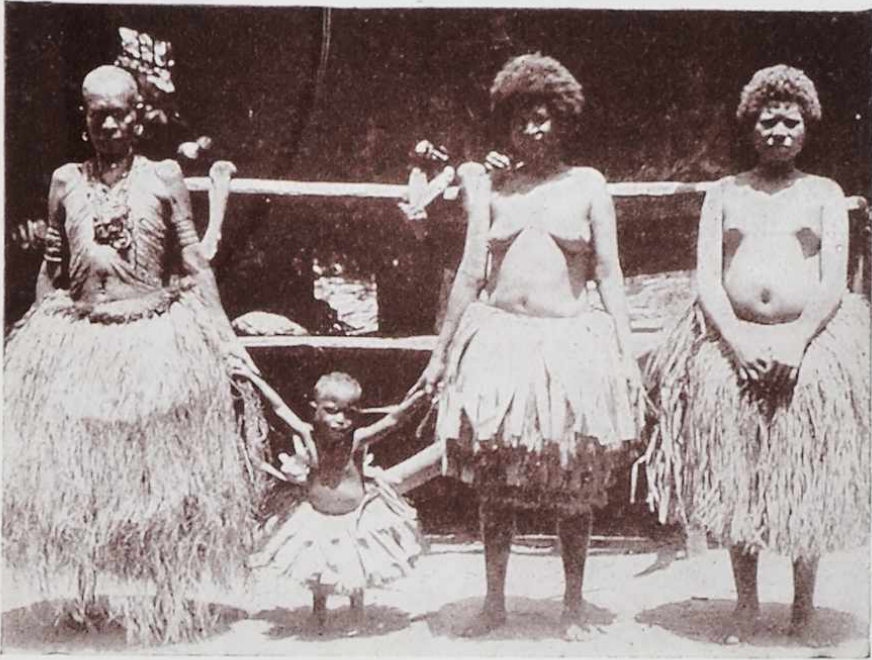
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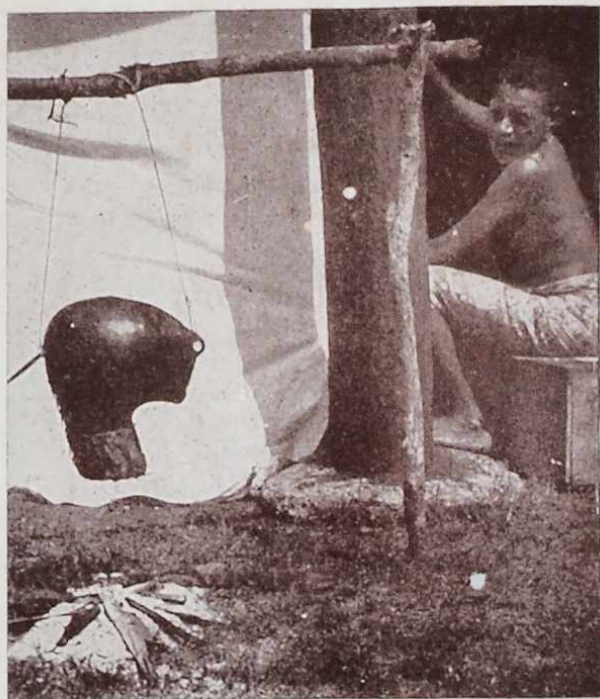
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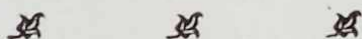
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