

(FRONTISPIECE) THE BAHR EL ZERAF. "HIPPOS" IN MID-STREAM.

A NOMAD IN THE SOUTH SUDAN

*THE TRAVELS OF A POLITICAL OFFICER
AMONG THE GAWEIR NUERS*

BY

“ BEN ASSHER ”

AUTHOR OF “ A NOMAD IN NORTH AMERICA ”

WITH PHOTOGRAPHS AND A MAP

H. F. & G. WITHERBY

326 *High Holborn, London, W.C.1*

1928



Printed for Messrs. H. F. & G. Witherby by the Library Press, Lowestoft

CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I KHARTOUM - - - - -	II
II SOUTH TO MALAKAL - - - - -	25
III MALAKAL - - - - -	50
IV LIFE IN OUT-STATIONS - - - - -	73
V THE NUER COUNTRY - - - - -	105
VI IN THE LONG GRASS - - - - -	117
VII AYOD AND THE DUK RIDGE - - - - -	137
VIII AYOD - - - - -	153
IX SAFARIA FROM AYOD - - - - -	165
X A MISSION FROM KHARTOUM - - - - -	231
XI SOUTH AGAIN - - - - -	251
XII FURTHER TRAVELS - - - - -	255
XIII LAST DAYS - - - - -	290

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

PLATES

THE BAHR EL ZERAF	-	-	<i>Frontispiece</i>	
STEAMER QUAY, KHARTOUM	-	-	<i>facing page</i>	26
YOUNG BANDITS AT EL DUEIM	-	-	„	26
ARAB TRADERS, JEBELEIN	-	-	„	26
RENK	-	-	„	40
A WOOD STATION	-	-	„	40
COTTON COMPANY'S STATION, BANK OF WHITE NILE	-	-	„	40
CONCOURSE AT R.C. MISSION LANDING STATION	-	-	„	46
AT A WOOD STATION	-	-	„	46
A WOOD STATION, WHITE NILE	-	-	„	46
STEAMER AT WOOD STATION	-	-	„	72
WOOD STATION	-	-	„	72
MULE CARTS, MALAKAL	-	-	„	72
KODOK LANDING STAGE	-	-	„	86
AT MELUT	-	-	„	86
LANDING STAGE, KODOK	-	-	„	86
KHOR ATAR POST	-	-	„	118
BANKSCAPES, UPPER NILE	-	-	„	118
TONGA LANDING STAGE	-	-	„	118
FIRST CAMP OUT OF KHOR ATAR POST	-	-	„	122
AYOD, CENTRAL WELL	-	-	„	154
COMMISSIONER'S QUARTERS, AYOD	-	-	„	154
VIEW FROM COMMISSIONER'S QUARTERS, AYOD	-	-	„	154

8 LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

AYOD; THE OFFICE	-	-	<i>facing page</i>	158
TALC BUSH	-	-	„	188
NUER VILLAGERS	-	-	„	264
PRIZE NUER BULL	-	-	„	264
NUER MAIDENS	-	-	„	264

MAP

DISTRICT OF THE BAHR EL ZERAF	„	„	II
-------------------------------	---	---	----

FOREWORD

It may be said with reason that for several years a great preponderance of cultivated English folk, did their thoughts chance to dwell on the Sudan in momentary contemplation of its real significance, were wont to picture that extensive territory as some remoter corner of the land of Egypt, or perhaps as an expanse of semi-desert countryside, the life of which, based mainly on Khartoum, had its essential focus in some cotton cultivation having dependence on the river Nile.

Recent events have doubtless turned the thoughts of many towards a wider interest in this sphere, wherein not only has a monument been laid to British jurisdiction over native races, but where the promise of a signal economic future has been already founded on the signs that lie to hand.

Within an area of such vast extent it is but natural there should be great differences of landscape, climate, race, and soil, and these indeed exist in contrast great enough to furnish an observer with a metaphorical kaleidoscope of strongly human interest. In the northern sector, Berber and Arab inhabit a flat and largely desert terrain watered only by the Nile and a precarious rainfall that is generally negligible. Further south, the annual incidence increases in approximate relation to the distance on beyond Khartoum, and by degrees the countryside loses its arid aspect to become well steeped in an increasing vegetation. Sand is replaced by fertile cotton soil, and scrub imperceptibly takes on a forest character. Arab tribes, largely intermingled with the negroid types which in a former time supplied the basis of a slave population, are supplanted many hundred miles above Khartoum by black-skinned savages, these being of as primitive

mentality as any known, and multiplying in diversity and numbers as the southern forest-covered confines of the territory are reached. Here are found mountain, stream and jungle scenery, and soil of varied kind, upon which rains beat in season with a vigour quite unknown in softer climes.

It was in certain portions of this southern sector that the writer passed two years as a political officer in the employ of the Sudan Government.

This last authority recruits its Civil Service chiefly from the two great universities, and maintains its list of permanent officials by a periodical selection from competing candidates. In addition to this source, however, there are certain officers, drawn from the Sudan Defence Force (formerly the Egyptian Army), who provide a useful military nucleus for the administration of the less settled areas in the south. Seconded from the British Army, these men serve as District Commissioners for varying spans of years, and except in a few cases, where finally absorbed as regular officials of the country, their experience is confined to a decade.

Hence as one laying no greater claim to privilege than as a bird of passage in those parts, the author seeks the special tolerance of many who have dedicated whole careers within a shrine in front of which he merely bowed. Such glimpses of a soldier's life as he may show reveal some aspects of the several peoples gathered beneath the tutelage of Britain in that part of Africa. Should readers be content with these, and not aspire towards reviews more comprehensive in survey, they may hereafter find light food for hours of mental idleness, and experience wider visions of this small and narrowing world.

LONDON,

B. A.

May, 1928.

CHAPTER I

KHARTOUM

Situated on the Blue Nile just above its junction with the White, this well-famed city furnishes a study in epitome of British rule in Africa. For there is about it an atmosphere of well-ordered authority, of definite yet neither arrogant nor pompous domination of the black race by the white, and of a quiet and peaceful harmony of scene and circumstance that truly marks the unaggressive power of England over the untutored peoples of her far-flung lands. Originally planned upon the lines of an encampment, Khartoum still preserves a certain air of military utilitarianism. Most of the main thoroughfares have been disposed as avenues radiating from some common centres, which in the case of an emergency would all form admirable locations for the employment of machine guns, should the necessity arise. Although the late rebellion that occurred soon after the murder of the last Sirdar furnished the city with its only bout of turbulence during the past twenty-five years, yet in a land where blood runs hot and wild ideas may quickly sway the crude fanatical mentalities that flourish in those climes, it is impracticable to dispense with all the military structures of an occupation seeking only peace and ordered progress as its aim. Notable amongst the features of the city is the width of road and avenue, which while perhaps extravagant of space, and likely in the future to affect materially the local budget, yet does away

with all suggestion of the unpleasant stuffiness so largely characteristic of less favoured cities of its kind. Along the riverside there runs a stone embankment, bordered by an avenue of tall and flowering trees, forming a waterfront which, from the opposing bank, provides a scene of much attraction. Bordering the town side of this avenue the quarters of a number of the government officials extend along the riverside in both directions, and as each house stands in a widely planted garden, where trees of many exotic types are clustered in considerable array, the entire locality presents a picture that could only be described as tropical.

Set in its own palatial grounds the Governor-General's palace occupies a central site along the embankment, and so abuts upon the avenue above referred to, which in its passage right across the front of that imposing building is confined at either end by gates that give an access to the residence. Removed but a little distance from the palace lies the War Office and the General Post Office, while some way down-stream on the frontal avenue is the Grand Hotel, that solitary haunt of fashion through the tourist season of the winter months. On beyond this quite pretentious hostelry are found the gardens of the Zoo, a retreat of which the major charm lies in its well-planned, shaded beds and avenues. There may be seen amidst a rich luxuriance of surroundings, always well patronized by the native populace, a representative collection of the less cumbrous animals that dwell within the confines of the territory, while birds of many kinds indigenous to it adorn caged plot and rustic aviary alike with showy brilliances of sumptuous, multi-coloured plumage. Beyond the Zoo again the road leads on towards the steamer quay, which lies close by the down-stream end of the embankment some distance from

the centre of the town, and whence the steamers leave fortnightly for Rejaf, the furthest point of navigation on the Upper Nile, south from Khartoum some fifteen hundred miles. Towards the opposite extremity of the embankment, just a little way beyond the palace, you will see that general meeting-place of all officialdom, the Sudan Club, standing back about a hundred yards in its own grounds. To this most pleasant haven of communion there repair the *élite* of the city after the labours of the day, and to the accompaniment of quip and jest partake of due refreshment and befitting stimulant. There also is the *mecca* of all servants of the Government stationed in distant corners of the land, and whether leave or duty brings them, especially at certain seasons of the year, men from most widely scattered regions are to be found in occupation of some part of the accommodation always available for them. In close proximity to the up-stream limit of the embankment lie the British barracks, the fort and armament shops; the former being manned by a detachment of the Royal Artillery under a Gunner captain. This fort alone of all the military establishments is visible from the riverside, the remaining buildings being situated to the rear, concealed from view behind the clumps of trees dispersed in the vicinity. At this point, too, is found the bridge across the Nile to Khartoum North, a locality distinguished by its stores and engineering works, and which might well be said to represent the industrial section of the city, although that term, liable to conjure up unpleasant visions of some bleak and overcrowded areas bathed in soot and grime, must never be allowed to influence a true appreciation of realities wherein the wide-spaced, peaceful thoroughfares of the main city have their fitting counterpart.

Apart from such Sudanese labourers as have employment in the city and those Arabs occupied by native commerce, the indigenous population of Khartoum attains no very large proportions, although the persons acting in some form of menial capacity as watchmen, runners, servants, grooms, and others in like category, must form a far from inappreciable fraternity. The bulk of native dwellers are concentrated in the town of Omdurman, lying a mile or two across the water on the left bank of the White Nile. This place was reconstructed after the famed battle of that name and now furnishes an excellent example of ordered native life under effective British rule. The local markets, though displaying year by year increasing quantities of cheap English cotton goods, and trinkets introduced from centres such as Manchester, yet keep their truly native character, offering the visitor some striking pictures of the life which has its being in this corner of the world. But if Omdurman contributes scenes of local colouring amongst the peoples of the soil, none the less interesting are those glimpses of its daily life which Khartoum offers us in their profusion. Here within the bosom of the city divergent strains of a conglomerate humanity impress themselves upon the vision everywhere; in shop and café, street and office, an endless diversity of form and feature passes in close review before the eye. Those soulless units in the administrative machine, the junior officials—clerks, interpreters, accountants and the rest—when not engaged on their punctilious duties by some ink-stained desk, are to be seen frequenting several open-air establishments within the town which minister to needs made pressing by the heat. These individuals collect in “tarbushed” groups of their own choice, filling the evening air with sounds of harsh cacophony and raucous banter.

The presence in the land of many such officials was for a time a most perplexing one. Composed in the first instance of Egyptians in the service of the Egyptian Government, and liable to tours of duty in the Sudan, they formed the only source of educated persons fitted for the necessary work. Perhaps in days before the outbreak of the European War, the matter did not bear the important aspect that was engendered afterwards, but certain is it that of recent years the presence in the country of a host of public servants, swayed by sympathies avowedly antagonistic to the British sphere of influence in the Sudan, was scarcely less than an embarrassment to the authorities concerned. Apart from this unhappy circumstance there was an added complication in the fact that the majority of the officials harboured a cordial hatred for the land itself, counting the days when they might once more lead their life amidst the better placed communities of their own country, which though itself a purely natural inclination hardly accorded with the oft-reiterated demand for a complete control of the Sudan by Egypt. Hence, the greater number of them, who had perforce to spend their allotted years of service far removed from the amenities of Cairene comfort, were vastly discontented with their lot, and as a consequence many the scheme evolved to bring, through reputation for ill-health, a comfortable billet at Khartoum.

With the founding of the Gordon College, an establishment that seeks to train and educate the more promising material of the population, some of the native born community commenced to fit themselves for the assumption of the minor posts within the government service, but it was not until quite recently that they began to be available in any numbers, since their studies had been started at an

early age. Following on the troubles that occurred in connection with the murder of Sir Lee Stack, all Egyptian-born officials not absolutely indispensable were soon transplanted to their spiritual homes, and the employment of the Sudanese as junior government officials now proceeds apace.

It is at such a juncture only fair to state that some Egyptians proved quite definite exceptions to the general rule of this disparity with their surroundings, and indeed it would be folly to deny that both amongst the army officers and those in civil employ were to be found some cases of outstanding loyalty to the British power. Nevertheless, I am not guilty of exaggeration when I say that all these individuals had absorbed a certain portion of the British outlook on affairs and, in a limited degree, the Britisher's mentality, which certainly imbued their thoughts and actions with an understanding and a judgment far removed from that of their own kind.

Predominant in all affairs of local commerce, and in his rôle of general merchant, the Greek has gained an important footing in the town and, indeed, within the confines of the country, penetrating as a trader of a great or lesser power into localities which in such guise none but a Levantine could easily be moved to enter. In fact, his ubiquity as principal or agent in all manner of commercial undertakings in the Sudan may be regarded as a boon to the European community, and there is not a doubt that his traditional abilities have stood them in good stead throughout the territory.

Conspicuous among his fellows is one Angelo Capato, founder of the firm that bears his name, which is accorded due significance in the chief households of the country. In its capacity as general providers and provision merchants this firm has for a long while been a local institution, whose passing

would obliterate a land-mark of the town and be responsible for a severe if transient dislocation of the comfort and convenience of a host of persons living in remote and scattered portions of the land. Capato has but a sole effective rival, a certain Morhig, likewise of Grecian ancestry, and primarily a druggist whose excursions into the provision business are of comparatively recent date. Angelo's manager, an unobtrusive but efficient person of like nationality, presides over a comprehensive store of almost every conceivable article of merchandise, ranging from both the simple boot and trouser button to the more complicated luxury of *foie gras*, that might be needed by those working in the territory's more distant parts, and he has achieved for both himself and his employer a reputation for square dealing that could well be envied in more favoured quarters of the globe. Capato never fails in a demand that comes his way, sells ivory, stores and packs trophies, and makes up the stores required for a fortnight or a year, and in the course of years has almost developed his concern into a department of the government itself.

Further cosmopolitan elements are to be noted in Khartoum in the persons of Syrians and natives of India. The former seem to favour the medical profession extensively, being of a somewhat more refined and cultured type than the Egyptians, while the latter follow similar pursuits, amongst which minor clerkships and the maintenance of curio shops are those most commonly observed. These, however, do not form a large proportion of the general motley; the Indians specially, though offering a marked contrast to the types surrounding them, are few in number.

At once the focus of economic and social life in the Sudan, Khartoum is dependent—in the latter

respect at least—upon the civil and military establishments which base themselves upon it. Without them would the the town indeed be dead, and there is witnessed a considerable difference in its vitality during the winter season, when all hands are at the plough, and the indefinite remaining period of the year when a large proportion of the British community is home on leave. In addition to the Governor-General, with his personal staff, and the central government machine in all its branches, the Head-quarter Staff of the Sudan Defence Force is in full flower in the city. As parallel adjuncts to these two institutions are to be found the Gordon College, previously referred to as an educational institution for natives of the country, and the Military School, which fulfils a similar rôle in the production of native officers for the army. Certain units of the Defence Force are always stationed here, and, too, at Omdurman, the headquarters of the artillery being in this category; while of British troops there was in my time a battalion (since increased to two) together with a detachment of British gunners, who form a garrison for the local fort. The native artillery, consisting chiefly of machine gun units, is under normal circumstances concentrated on Khartoum, being well placed for quick despatch to any point required, whenever the occasion so demands. Since the recent mutiny that synchronized with the murder of the former Sirdar, a battery of British Pack Artillery has been added to the strength of the Imperial Forces, and no doubt the establishment of other military and civil centres, if not already an accomplished fact, is to be envisaged in the coming years.

The non-official element does not occupy a conspicuous position upon the social stage of the locality. This is due in great part to the small numbers of Englishmen engaged in business in the city, such few

representatives as it has being concerned as shipping agents for the most part, or else occupied under the auspices of the two banking institutions dealing with the country's monetary affairs. Khartoum is in fact the thriving centre of a firmly-rooted officialdom, that prospers in surroundings far removed from all the bickerings of a popular and ill-informed daily press, and is responsible alone to the Foreign Secretary of the British Government. In such circumstances it performs an admirable work, untrammelled by the limitations of democracy, to which the appeal of well-phrased catch-words is too often apt to prove a source of instability. Such a régime is well suited to the present needs of the Sudan, and there is also not the slightest doubt that it receives approval from the Sudanese themselves, who hold their rulers in respect and willingly accept their jurisdiction. As for the question of the substitution of this system for one in which the Egyptian nation took direct control, at least amongst the Berbers and the Arabs the proposal has no single chance of an acceptance. A long stay within the country's boundaries is not required for an appreciation of this fact, and though a situation of the kind is quite unlikely to arise, there is no doubt that all attempts at Egypt's domination would be resisted by perpetual insurrections. As giving some insight into the existing outlook of the native leaders, an amusing and instructive story is recounted in connection with the disturbances that arose in Cairo and elsewhere during the troubles of 1921. The widely heralded demands of Egypt for complete control of the Sudan not having been countered by Great Britain, possibly, with the unequivocal refusals appealing to the Oriental mind, a certain nervousness upon the part of arab tribes around Khartoum began to manifest itself. This was perhaps accentuated by the dissemina-

tion of some local rumours on behalf of interested protagonists of the Egyptian claims, and in due course resulted in a deputation being formed to meet the Governor, from whom was sought the confirmation of report concerning the intended English abdication of all power in the land, for they would like to know, in order, so they said, "to make their own arrangements"!

Mention of the central government of Khartoum is incomplete without some reference to the subdivisions of the territory it controls. The country is divided into fifteen provinces, under governors, who are assisted in administration by a staff of District Commissioners, themselves responsible for certain areas of their own. As the extent of these areas is considerable, embracing in the case of thinly populated districts in the south and west great tracts of country of the size of Lancashire and Yorkshire merged in one, it follows that a formidable amount of travel must devolve on the Commissioners concerned, for whom at certain seasons of the year life becomes one continuous daily round of trek on trek. At the headquarters of each province a European staff is normally installed, consisting of the Province Engineer and one or other representatives of the medical and veterinary profession according to the local needs, while sundry other persons also find it convenient generally to base themselves upon the provincial centre. In this way small communities are formed in the remoter parts, and these, while tending locally to increase the amenities of life, offer at intervals to many stationed in sequestered posts the prospect of a wider intercourse with their own fellows, and a reunion with them in a comparatively advanced, if somewhat unexciting civilized society.

.

Reaching Khartoum in the early hours of the day towards the end of June, the writer rose with others to look out upon a scene of animation. The long station platform, built on a level with the ground, harboured a motley crowd of mainly native onlookers, who formed a mass of surging humans seeking to recognize their friends and relatives upon the train. Out of this shifting picture, after the lapse of a brief period, there stepped the figure of a reputedly miened Sudani, who in some way succeeded in identifying his presence as an emissary of the Government, ordained as guide to me, and charged with the responsibility of installing me as expeditiously as possible within the precincts of the Sudan Club. To this convenient haven I proceeded in a carriage previously hired on my behalf, and before long had settled down in harmony with my surroundings.

Upon the morrow came my first visit to the sanctuary of the Civil Secretary, being there greeted by a hale, but somewhat sinister-appeared individual, in the shape of the Assistant C.S., whose general bearing seemed well suited to the rôle of chief, but polished villain in a theatrical display. Urbane of manner, ready in address, this charming personage, I subsequently learnt, had achieved some local reputation as a redoubted host, whose stock of wines, especially imported from his own home cellar, was at once the pride and envy of Khartoum. Known in official circles as the "wicked bart", he enjoyed with fitting dignity a prestige largely based upon the excellence of his convivial dinner parties, which held high place amongst such functions in the capital. It may be here remarked that the cuisine of houses in Khartoum has reached a standard of accomplishment far surpassing what might be expected in a circle where the native cooks alone support its culinary

welfare. Social competition may be held accountable for this; aspiring hostesses will vie with one another for the service of the best. Thus boys who in past times were to be had for two or three Egyptian pounds a month, will now command a greatly increased wage, the nine pounds figure having been obtained by a few local specialists some years ago. From which it may be gathered that in Africa one need not be a stranger to the social rivalries of European lands.

In due course I became acquainted with the Civil Secretary, whose near relationship with a departed statesman of world-wide authority and note is clearly stamped upon his keen and virile features. Surrounded by a flood of papers, documents, and files, this harassed individual, freely perspiring in the heat of an approaching noontide, vouchsafed to me that he was utterly "snowed under"—which metaphor seemed very well adapted to his case. Discussing the conditions holding sway throughout the distant parts of the Sudan, whither I was bound, he emphasized the great advantages accruing from a knowledge of the local languages in dealings with the tribes inhabiting those regions. Each of these tribes has a peculiar dialect of its own, and any form of writing is unknown to them, whether in letter characters or crude designs. My own experience has convinced me that the incessant interchanging of officials in the various tribal areas, from health or other reasons, renders the work involved in a progressive study of these languages of dubious benefit both to the individual and the Government. In the first place, no one can be certain of remaining in the zone whose language he commenced to study, and as the various tribes are scattered over widely separated areas, there is a likelihood that his translation will surround him with

a race that speaks a different tongue. And furthermore, each tribal leader, as his acquaintance with the local Government and the police force grows to a certain confidence, comes in due time to speak a little arabic, which is the official medium of the law and its administration. Nevertheless it cannot be gainsaid that quite apart from all the difficulties of mastering the various forms of tribal speech, such mastery may be very useful on occasion, for the "mutairgamin" (native interpreters) can rarely be relied upon implicitly when they translate the evidence in native cases. The situation may be briefly summarized as one of circumstance and opportunity, further involved by the necessity of studying arabic, which has of course a prior claim and is essential for the efficient conduct of the daily round and common task.

Another point of recognised importance which my subsequent experience showed me needed modifying, relates to the accepted fact that for effective dealing with the "natives" breeding must form the background of essential qualities in any European ruler. In the Sudan, this is as true as in the case of other oriental lands, when there is need to officer or to administer races which, having themselves experienced civilizing influences, have also learnt to understand those qualities which go to make a gentleman, no matter what his colour scheme may be. In other words, the delegation of authority to "sahibs" is of importance paramount in the administration of a subject race. But the case takes on a somewhat different aspect when it concerns relations with untutored savages, whose deep perceptions of such rôle is limited by an entirely pristine view (tooth and claw in fact) and to whom fear and not respect is their prime motive of obedience to the law and its commands. Here, though the

principle may hold, there is a change of application, and in this case, although the savage may not recognise essential differences between contrasting types of whites, his treatment at the hands of shabby individuals, or those not animated by impartial and unprejudiced concern, is likely at the best to lead to endless discontent, with every prospect of rebellion in the end.

CHAPTER II

SOUTH TO MALAKAL

The European passengers upon this voyage, with the exception of myself, were destined for Rejaf. Amongst these, two sportsmen whom I had encountered previously on the train between Luxor and Assouan, assumed a rôle of prominence within the scheme of daily life as the boat ploughed her measured way upon the quietly gliding Nile. Both men were in "robustious" health, and being moved by nature towards foolhardy and rapacious feeding, there were occasions when their table comrades became the butt of deprivations which, if of a merely temporary incidence, proved not a whit the less exacting on their appetites ensharpened by the gentle breeze of heaven. With the daily lowering of the sun over a far horizon, the pair, in an endeavour to maintain the fitness with which they had both set out upon their travels, followed a course of such equestrian acrobatics on the upper deck as made them sources of some danger to those bolder spirits who fared forth in their vicinity. Mounted on chair and boat rail (Heaven forbid that there should be a more precarious perch than this!) and armed with the mallet-headed polo-sticks of custom, they engaged in free displays of mimic horsemanship, filling the air with various oaths and rarer cries that must have added to the steamer's passage, in the eyes of the indigenous proletarians met with from place to place upon the river banks,

a fascination and a mystery infrequently encountered in such guise.

There was also on this boat an officer of the R.A.M.C., employed in medical capacity in the Egyptian Army, he being bound for the Mongalla Province on some special mission that required his presence in those parts. He was not far from the completion of his ten years' service in the Sudan, and hoped, like individuals similarly placed, to have the opportunity of hunting elephants, which in the course of travel he might reasonably expect to meet. It may perhaps seem strange to many unacquainted with the lives of men who have selected work in lands that hold the wilder beasts, that they should not by any means all seek the pleasures of the chase with natural fervour ; but it is certain there are those whose tendencies do not incline them towards the hunting of big game, except where by destruction of their quarry a definite financial benefit accrues to them. It was from such a viewpoint that this sportsman looked upon his prospects in the sphere of elephants, not striving to dissemble his opinions ; freely expressing doubts as to the professed enjoyment of the men who thus engage in sport, and holding rather that the incentive towards the gain of filthy lucre was dominated generally by a sensation of unpleasantness and fear, which, but for the contemplated monetary gains would certainly prevent them from participating in such expeditions. Of his ilk it is admitted not a few are to be found, but let it also be asserted with full confidence that such are of the type who choose the fleshpots of a social life within Khartoum, or the unsullied peacefulness of neighbourhoods where the methodical receipt of native taxes, and the persistent grazing of the flocks, pursue in changeless guise the normal tenour of their ways.

(A)



(B)



(C)



(A) STEAMER QUAY, KHARTOUM.
(B) YOUNG BANDITS AT EL DUEIM.
(C) ARAB TRADERS, JEBELEIN.

Outstanding from amongst the social customs of the Sudan, and not as widely practised in hot countries as from the soundest motives it should be, there may be cited the invariable unanimity with which both British civil servants and their soldier comrades always refrain from the consumption of any form of alcohol during the hours between the rising and the setting of the sun. Never have I once seen the slightest deviation from this universally accepted rule, whether surrounded by the amenities of civilisation in the north, or passing days of interminable "safaria" over the sun-cracked cotton plains that fill the southern provinces. As if by way of natural corollary to this most excellent restraint, there has sprung up beside it an observance equally commendable, which prompts, in every place and under every circumstance, a punctual and harmonious recognition of the sun's retreating rays. In the wild and open spaces where there is not a roof to shield the wanderer, the evening ceremony may assume a nature quiet and dignified, but where some two or three are met together in a fellowship amidst surroundings much less primitive if more disturbed, the cries of men accustomed to the obedient ministrations of a humbler race are heard in glorious symphony of voice and tune. Thus upon the highest level of the many storied steamer, as the lowering orb prepares to take its final plunge into a sea of tufted grass and scattered bush extending far beyond the range of eyes made weary through the now mercifully fading day by the relentless vigour of a fiery sun that has long decked the landscape in a flood of brilliant light, a happy choir of eager voices, taking the lead from one among their number, starts in to chant in well-timed unison the stern refrain that quickly brings a dusky servitor to do their bidding. "Wa-aa-hid!" This strange, fierce cry is wafted

on the waters and reverberates throughout the furthest corners of the boat, and through the double-decked auxiliaries attached to it. "Wahid", meaning in arabic 'one', 'someone', 'any one', is most expressive of that definite yet careless wish that there appear at once a minion from amongst the many who abound in adequate yet most respectful, unobserved propinquity to these their masters. Enlivened at the hour of sunset by this simple daily ritual, we, whom the heat of day has filled with feelings of a meretorious abstinence, foregather in deck chairs around the table now replete with cool and stimulating drinks.

Accompanying us upon this journey were three foreigners bound southward for the Belgian Congo. One, a colonial judge, tall, thin and sallow, possessed of that untroubled lethargy which helps to form the many-sided heritage of a long residence within the tropics. A very pleasant individual, showing a notable conversance with the English tongue, and displaying all the affability that is a common attribute of Belgium's upper class, he yet evinced an insight into the commercial prospects of his country's colony that bore the mark of clarity and full appreciation of his theme. His two companions, a man engaged in business in those regions, travelling with his wife, furnished a somewhat striking contrast to his personality. The man, short, fat and dumpy, whose exterior lent an air of strong provincialism to his fatuous and unprepossessing mien, was handicapped amongst a party of aggressive Britishers by having little knowledge of their tongue and having less in common with their hearty, boisterous ways. He retained throughout the voyage the proverbial back-seat that it had been his lot to take from the commencement. This individual's lady, on the other hand, a pretty consort for her "brave Belge" mate,

was quickly instrumental in effecting a light backing to the foreground of intensive manhood that was at all times wont to dominate saloon and after-deck throughout the day, imparting to a somewhat restless entourage a graceful leavening that went far towards alleviating certain cruder aspects of its boisterous "joie de vivre". Gifted by Latin custom with a strong propriety, her agitation quickly showed itself when I one day suggested to her she should pose for photographs: she flew for succour to the judge, in whom she seemed to have the greatest social confidence, dragging him by his unwilling arms into a picture that could leave no doubt as to the impartial nature of my own recording art.

The boat was in charge of a young English engineer who had but recently received employment with the steamer service and was undertaking his first passage of the Nile, filled with a fearful sense of the responsibility that lay upon him. The river bed is covered here and there with shifting sandbanks, which in the season of low water offer impediment to navigation, and it will often happen that a boat (still further handicapped by an attendant barge) is lodged for hours on a submerged and unseen bank of mud, which it has struck, as like as not, during the course of progress in the night.

Government boats are always navigated by a "räis" or native helmsmen, but on the post-boats that maintain the fortnight's river service between Khartoum and Rejaf, a European engineer, who is more usually an Englishman or Greek, assumes control but is not held accountable for navigation of the boat.

Having on this occasion the misfortune to encounter quite a number of these banks, because the river was not standing at the time near its high flood level, we passed a series of quite ineffectual hours at

various points along the course, employing every known and improvised device for disengaging a flat-bottomed boat from formidable barriers of this kind. These minor incidents soon had a cumulative effect, engendering in the breasts of the two swashbucklers an anxiety as to the final consequence upon their own time-table, and all of this became reflected in their adoption of a sarcastic attitude towards an unhappy prey of circumstance—the engineer.

Of all the river journeys offering comfort amidst changing panoramas of romantic setting, it may be doubted whether any bears comparison with this Nile voyage. Except to those who through long sojourn in the zone of the remoter provinces have had their eyes accustomed to the reaches of the mighty waterway, and to whom the changing spectacle of forest, grass and tribal village has long ago developed into a monotony of endless miles, this cruise along the banks that border regions of a picturesque and fabled memory provides a leisured progress amongst fascinating scenes, and varied pictures of the native life, that will afford some glorious contrasts for the coming years.

Leaving the quay at Khartoum the steamer passes out into the Blue Nile, and in the course of minutes turns sharply southward at that river's junction with the White. This feature is composed by the huge sheet of water brought together hereabouts by the two vast streams whose distant sources have such a widely separated heritage. Here, too, are seen the differing floods of water, the Blue Nile, hurling her dark, rich, muddied life-blood into the common artery, the White, moving on sluggishly as with a steady purpose, her earth-tinged and insipid waters bordering awhile the unstemmed torrent that has come to greet her, and to consume it later in her relentless passage to the sea. Wide indeed at this

point is the famous waterway, and with the setting sun an orb of golden splendour low on the horizon, where narrow strips of distant land, punctuated at some points by distant trees focussed like pins upon the mirror of the eye, appear like streaks upon the watery foreground that surrounds on every side, no traveller can but marvel at the solemn desolation of the scene. Eastward, a hurrying surge of dust moves out across our front, but as this makes a change in its direction a strange and solemn peacefulness descends upon the air, and it would seem our ship was cast alone upon the waters of the Nile. And as the ruddy glow sinks downward towards another dawn in far-off climes, the call of Bacchus strikes firm chords within the assembled company. Wa-aa-hid!

Considered over the length of its course the Nile is not a wide river, yet there are stretches not far south of Khartoum where it attains to four or five miles wide, and where the stream becomes extremely sluggish and the river almost takes the semblance of a long and narrow lake. The widest portions of the Nile are at its mouth, or in the delta district, where the main stream is broken up by multitudes of islands, varying in extent, which militate against a true appreciation of its width. Upon the other hand, for many a mile where it flows through the territory of the White Nile province, it is devoid of insular obstruction, and presents to view that great expanse to which a reference has before been made. There is perhaps no river valley harbouring such a water-way where popular conceptions of the geographic term are more belied by actuality. A region generally of an inordinate and dreary flatness, comprising in its southern sphere one vast and level plain, those rocky prominences rising in places near the river banks form easily remembered landmarks in a landscape that was levelled in far days by the Creator's master

eye. Some sixty miles above Khartoum stands such an eminence—named Jebel Auliya—a conspicuous mount, which forms the only element of protest to the general scheme for a considerable distance to the north and south. The river at this point is very wide, and the construction of a dam in the locality has long been a considered prospect. This would of course result in the formation of an enormous artificial lake, and scores of arab villages with their surrounding fields would of necessity be overwhelmed, thus adding in the way of monetary compensation a formidable item to the scheme's first cost.

The first important point of call along the upstream journey is at El Dueim, which is the capital of the White Nile province. This has a picturesque appearance from the boat, and a first glance over the white buildings, constituting an important arab city out of which there rises the harmonious tower of the local mosque, provides approach to it by water with an impressive, oriental setting.

The foreshore of the river for some distance round the landing-stage presents a scene of curious animation. Bags of grain lie strewn about in all directions, livestock are tethered to a variety of pegs most curiously improvised, or to some quaintly cumbrous articles of domestic furniture, while scattered bundles of decrepit hens, all tied together by their feet in bunches of a round half-dozen, are seen to lie about at random quite unsheltered from the blazing sun. Often the arrogance of roosters brings farcical intrusion to the scene, and here and there a sight of timorous and suspicious-looking felines forces itself upon the astounded eye. As soon as the steamer has been made fast properly, an assault upon the barges is commenced. Groups of excitable and incoherent native labourers stand in expectant mood around the numerous bales of merchandise, the while their

merchant masters, garbed in full-flowing robes, hover around them to ensure the execution of their richly-mouthed commands. Shoeless, and naked to the waist, and covered each as to his loins with divers ragged raiment, which in virtue of its shredded state assumes a picturesque appearance, a stream of Afric's brawny sons of toil now start to mount the gently sloping planks stretching from the barges to the sandy foreshore, with each one carrying the sacks or bales required of him, returning in due course along a parallel roadway for prompt replenishment of his initial burden. Gathered nearby in ever-shifting concourses and yelling one against the other at the top of high-pitched voices, there can be seen what may perhaps amount to half the puerile populace of El Dueim—a spectacle of buoyant, semi-clothed and garrulous humanity, whose strident cries, wafted on breezes bearing a strange and questionable odour from this curious throng, combines with scorching rays emitted by the mid-day sun to foster in the senses of the onlooker a discord that is quaintly fascinating.

With the portals guarding this kaleidoscopic scene once left behind, the journey is resumed along a narrowing waterway. On either hand there still remains the old monotony, and here and there are dotted villages as was the case before. About this time the talc tree (later on ubiquitous)—gum-bearing product of the soil indigenous to the Sudan—first makes appearance in conspicuous quantities, forming the local forests which supply the various wood-stations, these being features of the river life. Dotted about at varying intervals upon the banks of both the Niles, and separated by considerable distances, they provide the essential links in the sole fuel supply available, and form a chain stretching along the main navigable portions of the two great rivers. Each station is entirely staffed by native personnel

consisting of some labourers and an overseer, who may or may not be a representative of office elements, now rapidly arising in the country, and which have elsewhere proved disturbing moths in oriental politics. The scene at these places always provides a touch of local colouring, and during the tedious interval when wood is being loaded on the barges a ramble in the precincts of the station may be relied upon to furnish many quaint pictures of the natives' life. Stacked in high piles, whose deft arrangement fills the observant eye with an impression of well-ordered labour, and separated from each other by such distances as will permit the ready passage of two men between them, these neatly built-up heaps of reddish timber, surrounded at their bases by the strands of broken bark that lie in seas of powdery tree-dust all around—where agitations by the human foot and nature's airs are tending constantly to launch them on the atmosphere of the vicinity—though perhaps insufficiently remarkable in their appearance as to warrant a prolonged attention on the part of casual visitors, are yet a quiet reminder of the untiring zeal which is required for punctual transport in these sparsely peopled lands. While hordes of dark-skinned Sudanese move in a long procession from the stacks of firewood to the barge, carrying on their shoulders as many standard lengths of timber as they can reasonably bear, it may be well that workers otherwise engaged, men occupied in felling, cutting and transporting logs themselves, will come from time to time upon the scene, driving their heavy-laden mokes towards the dump, where they are soon divested of their temporary loads.

As others now commence to renovate the dwindled piles from newly won material, we can move on to further explorations of the small community which the establishment of this destructive industry has firmly planted in the neighbourhood. Near to the

scenes of travail just described, or else removed from them a little way, according to the nature of the ground, we see the conically grass-thatched "tukls" of the native labourers, covering a patch of limited extent and forming a small village to which wives and numerous offspring doubtless contribute an increasing band. Near to each "tukl" or, it may be, located elsewhere, there is most likely to be seen a plot of cultivated ground devoted to the growth of "dura" (Indian corn), which forms the staple basis of the native diet right throughout the whole Sudan, for vast numbers, which include the population of the south, depend for sustenance entirely on the coarsely home-crushed flour that is prepared and conjured into the flattened cakes known to the Arabs by the name of "kisra".

Ranging in purposeful isolation, or perhaps foraging collectively in friendly posses, that ubiquitous adjunct of civilised man, the domestic hen, will be seen in half-starved entity and great profusion seeking what she may devour, the while accompanying cock birds, in the intervals of an intensive search, will help to swell the noxious chorus of proclaiming fowls.

Some three days travel up-stream from Khartoum lies Kosti, an increasingly important place that takes its name from the Greek merchant who is reputed to have founded it by the establishment of successful commerce in the days long past. Many years after his demise the government is said to have renamed the prosperous town with an infliction more in accordance with its native character, but all attempts to foist this change on the community proved ineffectual, owing to passive resistance in the neighbourhood, and before long there was reversion to the former name. The town derives its consequence from its position at the rail and river junction formed by

the line from Khartoum to El Obeid crossing the Nile near by, for it has thus direct communication with the metropolis by rail and steamer, and also train connection with the town of Sennar on the Blue Nile. There is a large arab population based on this centre and the native market is a quite important one. Employment for the many comes from the engineering shops belonging to the railway system, and future years will likely witness great expansion in the town's activities.

There was at Kosti when I first passed down the Nile a resident commissioner who in the passing years had garnered for himself the far-flung notoriety that is engendered by outstanding personality. An Irishman of a robust and portly build, his beaming countenance gave outward, unconstrained expression to a cheerful generosity of heart which came into a special prominence on all occasions of festivity. And without doubt the periodic visits of the post-boats did afford occasions for the display of this official's *bonhomie*, when not compelled by the exigencies of his profession to abandon intercourse with passengers to which convivial tendencies were prompting him. At all events I can record that our arrival there was hailed by this brave soul with overwhelming friendliness of manner, the joy of which was not the less for us by reason of its coming from so unforeseen a source. A small party was ensconced in the saloon engaged in playing poker, a recreation most peculiarly suited to the needs of men foregathered in enforced company during unprofitable moments of extended travel. The steamer was expected to remain some hours at this place, and having from the deck shed a casual glance over the surroundings of the landing-stage and on the town beyond, we had returned to the scene of former labours with vigour now renewed. In the midst of boisterous bidding, which filled the place

with sounds of lusty vocal strife but was restrained to not unseemly limits by the presence of la brave Belge, who was, however, evincing signs of natural womanly emotion at the primordial sight of males engaged in fierce contentions of the kind, a deep roar dominated of a sudden the less unbridled utterances of the assembled company, and as all heads turned round to seek the source of interruption a large boyish figure was seen standing in an attitude of challenge at the door of the saloon. Accosting the perplexed throng with some disparaging references to his identity, the jovial visitor, upon whose features were engrained the symbols of an inebriate tendency, inspired the players at first glance with a warm and ready sympathy. It follows without comment that his presence was the almost instant sign for heaping coals of fire on the heads of the immortal god after the customary manner of those humans who, descrying one of their own kind in an advanced, receptive mood, seek to add final touches of debauchery to his precarious fate. Thus while some dusky minions speed towards the far recesses of the ship to garner fresh libations for their lords, the newcomer assumes a seat with careless ease amongst the party at the table, casting on each a glance of generous welcome, which for the moment lingers on the comely features of the Belgian spouse, who eyes the intruder with a look of apprehension and alarm. Chatting to us, his new-found friends, in confidentially cheery tones, broken at times by loud guffaws and happy witticisms, he lightly joins the game whose tenour he has been responsible for breaking, but which now merrily proceeds apace. Quaffing continuously from the bumpers of cool drinks which have by this time been arrayed before him, he indulges in a flight of bidding without principle, negligent of all financial consequences, and as if actuated by an abandon worthy of

mediaeval times. While smiling on this roseate optimism, the harder-headed of the assembled gamers do not appear unduly loth to glean thereby a profit, and at the end of these activities, which the departure of the boat enforced on him, this gay administrator, if perhaps heavier in spirit, certainly retired lighter in his heart and pocket than he had entered in. Farewell, blithe soul! We shall again meet in happy company.

A few miles on beyond the town of Kosti the Nile is spanned by an impressive railway bridge carrying the line to El Obeid across the river and furnishing another landmark on the mighty waterway. Passage is made between the central pillars; a portion of its middle span swings outwards at right angles to the bridge, thus giving clearance for the steamer and its barges in procession.

It is in this locality that the Southern Cross first becomes visible to students of the nocturnal skies, appearing clearly but with no great brilliancy at a low elevation in the heavens; a famous constellation around which there hangs for a novice to the tropics a curtain of romantic inspiration, to be dispelled only after his first glance has lighted on the golden pointers of its frame. But how real, too, the atmosphere of soft romance that in the night surrounds the traveller as he moves slowly down the Nile, under the celestial ægis of the stars! Beneath the myriad golden-studded canopy of heaven, flanked by the unfilled spaces of an unfrequented clime, companioned, yet unseen of those companions, who with him share the obscure seclusion of an unilluminated after-deck where naught but an occasional shadowy form becomes discernible through the darkling night, striving with searching eyes to pierce the sombre gloom of forest, reed, and bush that line the river banks on either side, there comes to him no sound

save the incessant rush of water churned by the stern-wheel to a pitch of melancholy frequency, save as from time to time the unburdened spirit of a native wayfarer finds true expression in a monotonous thrumming on his simple drum which offers him a ready means towards that harmony of mind and body that is the guerdon of a joyous soul. To him, too, comes perchance the greeting of some solitary wanderer upon the bank, who with the human promptings towards the herd must voice his recognition of this passing show of civilising might, and so he yells a welcome that is carried on across the water and re-echoed by the listless watchers on the barge. Or maybe the occasional weird notes of troubled night-birds, in which the haunting form and outline of the moving steamer have aroused ill-hidden feelings of resentment and alarm, linked with a natural fear inspired by the rush of sparks that from the unseen smoke-stack issues at intervals in a bright turbulence of spangled flame.

And, too, Orion, that belted unit of the starry night, will stand in self-revealing clarity from out the lighted structure of the heavens, viewed it is true in northern lands, but never viewed in such a clear and brilliant fashioning.

By day, as changeless miles of uninhabited country reveal a panorama of monotonous impress, there looms before us from afar the twin-peaked rocks of Gebelein, whither a tortuous course upon the Nile at length conveys us. Formed of a red shale soil, covered with many-shaped and ill-assorted boulders, these two low hillocks impart a striking background to the native village which has assumed the rôle of central trading-post within the region where it lies. Here there are gathered a few Arab merchants, and perhaps the agents of some large trader who is himself quartered farther north, while a more primitive

motley forms the nucleus of the population of this southern outpost of the White Nile province.

From now onwards the Nile banks wear an aspect which becomes yet more and more divergent from the regions further north. Such change is due in greater part to the increasing incidence of rain as progress up-stream is accomplished.

The changing nature of the soil is yet another potent factor towards this end, for with the slow replacement of a sandy countryside for one of cotton-soil content, the local grasses undergo a radical mutation. The light talc trees and thorny bushes of the north are supplemented by the increasing growth of a more tropical variety; low tufted clumps give place to overwhelming prodigality of long, rank grasses, rising as much as eight or ten feet high in districts which are most affected by the rains.

In the vicinity of Renk, an important centre of administration lying within the province of the Upper Nile, a veritable jungle is encountered on both river banks, and this long stretch of forest, marked by a tangled undergrowth, and with its many kinds of trees entwined by strands of heavy creeper, reaches some distance into the interior on either hand. This belt of timbered territory has not a counterpart for some great distance down the Nile, and forms a natural and effective game reserve that harbours several different kinds of animals, including monkeys, which do not appear in other areas of the province. Renk is not seen from near the river bank, being removed from it a distance of a mile or more, and from the steamer nothing is seen except the landing-stage, from which a tree-lined avenue leads up towards the village and administrative buildings; bushes and grass are the outstanding features of the surrounding scene.

A little further on beyond this point of call we



(B)



(C)



(A) RENK: CAUSEWAY AND AVENUE TO VILLAGE.

(B) A WOOD STATION.

(C) COTTON COMPANY'S STATION ON BANK OF WHITE NILE.

pass by two small islands overgrown with reeds, and lying near the bank; these are the habitat of quite innumerable egrets that have made the spot their home. Such birds receive protection and assemble here in tens of thousands, forming a white carpet over the entire area and providing an amazing spectacle when settled peacefully upon the vegetation of the same.

It is in this neighbourhood that crocodiles begin to make their appearance in large numbers. Hidden in amongst the rushes at the water's edge, or floating some few yards from off the bank, they reveal but little of their own anatomy to view of man or beast, remaining motionless below the surface of the river with only snout and eyes discernible to a keen vision. Should they be lying screened amongst the grasses fringing on the stream, and the boat's course approach their resting-place too closely, then with a sudden movement, almost rapier-like, they will plunge out into the harbouring bosom of the water and be seen no more. There are at varied intervals along the Nile localities in which wide sandbanks slope towards the river from its natural bournes. Except at periods of high flood these sandbanks offer favoured resting grounds for numbers of the reptiles which may be seen in shoals all basking at the water's edge and dozing with a well-feigned negligence upon the golden sand. These likewise, should the approach of any boat invade the sanctity of their wild freedom, will hurl themselves with lightning speed into the river, sinking below the surface to rise later in mid-stream, with eyes that view the intruder from afar, and snouts poised ominously just an inch or so above the water. It is a sight both fascinating and grotesque to watch the ungainly outlines of these creatures separated a few feet from one another upon the foreshore of long tracts of sand; a strange array

of shapes and sizes, representing growths through varying years, some covered in the muddy brown of juvenility, others with skins which shine bright yellow in the sun's fierce light, and yet again the massive forms of older creatures covered by solid scales of green. Classed with the vermin of the land, they do not receive protection under statute, and provide all such as care with excellent snap-shooting from the steamer's deck, though the first volley is the signal for a headlong rush of every reptile in the neighbourhood towards the safety of a watery veil. While "potting crocs" cannot be classed as an example of the higher forms of sport, it nevertheless provides a satisfaction and amusement far transcending that to be sought from the plebeian bottle-shy. In point of fact the crocodile takes yearly toll of far from negligible numbers of the population, especially amongst the wilder tribes, amongst whom all fatalities will usually occur when unattended individuals go to the river banks to drink or to fetch water; the creatures lying camouflaged beneath the surface remain completely motionless until their unsuspecting victim has advanced some distance in the water, when of a sudden they impart so vigorous a swing to their huge tails as to sweep him irrevocably off his feet, and he is quickly dragged below by powerful jaws and drowned.

Though not encountered in such large numbers there is another interesting species common to these regions, to wit the hippopotamus, which congregates in shoals of varying size, being first spotted generally when half-immersed quite near the bank. A highly nervous animal despite the frequency with which he must encounter traffic on the Nile, he soon betakes himself to deeper waters on the approach of river craft, and diving towards the middle of the stream is quickly lost to view, although the bolder of his

kind, having some qualities in common with the "old, old soldier", often pursue the invaders of their natural privacy with disapproving glance from mid-stream, having permitted them the access over their immersed bodies and later reappeared to occupy those half-submerged positions that are affected by their fellow strategists, the crocodiles.

Hippopotamuses in their natural habitat furnish a spectacle of interest and curiosity, to which their strange, spontaneous antics lend at times a touch elementary of humour. Until accustomed to the sight of these great animals mustered in water three to four feet deep, their looming, barrel-contoured forms projecting motionless therefrom, the sun's rays beating down upon their glistening backs and their fantastically moulded heads pointing in all directions, the novice will have some difficulty in distinguishing the curious mass from a small island near the river bank, until upon the steamer's close approach movement will be diffused into the dormant whole, which will assume a sudden animation, gliding out into deep water to the accompaniment of raucous gruntings and the occasional deep-throated bellow of a surprised and angered male. Encountered either singly or in shoals as they disport themselves in deeper water, they will proceed to dive beneath the surface after first casting many a ruefully suspicious glance towards their visitors, turning their heads towards the bottom of the river and lifting skywards the most grotesque posteriors, which are surmounted by an absurd inadequacy of tail, and often parting with a well-timed "joie de vivre" ere they are hidden by the muddy stream. Sometimes, too, when separated from intruders by such an interval as can relieve them of a sense of fear, they raise ungainly heads high out above the water, and as it were in menacing and baleful speculation on the passing scene offer betimes

that adverse and reflective criticism which by the emission of strange grunting bellows they can well express. At night these creatures roam about inland, pasturing freely on the bountiful supplies of vegetation near at hand, and communing with one another through the dark in short staccato grunts which fall unmusically upon the human ear across the night. The great abundance of the hippopotamus along the Nile, and more especially along its tributaries, owes a great deal to the enactment that prohibits shooting of the beast from steamer decks, from which they would provide an easy target; to the provisions, too, of the game licences, which, as in the case of other animals, restrict the numbers that may be destroyed. It must however be admitted that there are many falling victims to the native tribes, who in the drier season of the year descend to various vantage points upon the river's edge, and, hunting in canoes, take sanguinary toll of them with spears and sharply pointed fishing prongs. It is a common sight in season to encounter places on the river bank where the colossal carcass of a hippopotamus, after division into narrow strips, has been left hanging upon lengths of grass-made rope fastened to sticks embedded in the ground, or else suspended carelessly on bush and reeds along the waterside, and in the process of sun-drying being the potent and immediate source of the most overwhelming stench known to the whole Sudan, rivalling, and surpassing even, the lugubrious emanations from the fish-manure that haunts our English countryside at certain times of agricultural activity.

But for keen nature students it may well be claimed the most inviting of these natural history studies are to be found amid the scenes of multi-coloured bird life which infest the regions of the Upper Nile throughout the year. The profusion is

indeed amazing, and there seems no limit to the diverse colourings of the feathered forms of every shape and size that either find a permanent abode within the country or for a period sojourn there when on their seasonal migrations to another clime. Prominent amongst the many-plumaged denizens located in these parts are several types of stork, a tribe with representatives of almost every known sub-species of its kind, that forms a royal display of colour all along the Nile. One of the commonest of sights is certainly the fishing eagle, which may be seen high-perched upon the top of a small tree near the river bank ; from this position it surveys the waters and has long since grown accustomed to the sight of passing boats. Wild duck and geese are met with in enormous quantities, and crows and vultures, not to mention several types of eagle, scatter themselves across the countryside. The kinds of smaller birds are legion. It is impracticable to seek enumeration of varieties whose plumage varies with the seasons and presents a bright kaleidoscope of colour to the observant eye.

Evidence of human habitation dwindles greatly after leaving Renk. Most of the native villages are found inland, or at least settled a little distance from the river bank, and the inhabitants lose something of their arab strain, to merge at length into the more primitive variety. Such Arabs as are met with occupy themselves as traders, and confine activities to settled trading-posts and centres of administration. One of such trading-posts is Kaka, situated one day's voyage up-stream from Renk, and here a prosperous community of mingled races has built up a small, well-ordered village which, by reason of a long rough road that joins it with Talodi, headquarters of the Nuba Mountains province, has been developed into a place of some importance, being an outlet now for

an appreciable amount of trade with that great region.

Melut, not many hours further on, is an administrative sub-division known as a "mamuria" owing to normal superintendence by a Sudanese official or "mamur", who is directly under orders from the white commissioner administering the wider region that includes this small locality within its bounds.

Melut itself harbours a mission carried on by an evangelist with the assistance of his wife, and a few hours' further steam ahead a Roman Catholic establishment is met with, where a fine endeavour has resulted in the erection of a set of prosperous buildings and a landing-stage.

The subject of these local missions has for a long while been a vexed consideration, and it must seem that all the various currents of opinion which any policy in their regard has fostered are not without their counterparts in other corners of the globe. The missionary societies, there can be no doubt, through their support and blessing of the widely separated overseas endeavours owing existence to them, act not alone from motives of the highest faith, but in the furtherance of a divine injunction, and at the least because of this last mandate are not resisted in such firm endeavours by the Christian powers. Upon the other hand, it cannot be gainsaid that the beneficial influence of missionaries amongst such backward and primordial peoples as are encountered in the south Sudan is at the present moment problematical. The essential point, so often overlooked in matters of the kind, is one of personality, for while some men are individuals of the highest stamp, so many of their ilk are anything but suitable for introduction into areas where it is leaders who are prime necessities. It is a somewhat strange and, from a certain point of view, a most unhappy fact that Roman Catholic missionaries have earned the best prestige amongst their

(A)



(B)



(C)



(A) CONCOURSE AT LANDING-STAGE OF R.C. MISSION.
(B) AT A WOOD STATION.
(C) A WOOD STATION ON THE WHITE NILE.

fellow men, but if this state of things be merited, then is the cause thereof not far to seek, being apparent from a study of the individuals concerned.

Turning now to the general effects of missionary work upon the native tribes it is a curious commentary on human nature to be obliged to say that from at least material points of view results seem gradually retrograde. Why this should be so it may not perhaps be useful to enquire, but it is certain that with a very elementary people, blessed with a paucity of moral qualities that could be accounted useful to mankind, the main result of teaching them the simple principles of Christianity is to divorce them from whatever essence of virility used to be theirs originally by nature. Briefly put, it would appear that a good Christian makes an indifferent native, and if this statement be an acceptable hypothesis the only explanation that may with any consequence be entertained is that the Christian teaching is not well suited to individuals of that low mentality, whose minds tend only to absorb the obvious failings of its followers and are unable to appreciate the truer basis of their higher qualities. But it must never be forgotten that the activities of the missionary are not confined within religious spheres alone, and that his energies are freely turned at many points towards the realm of practical affairs, wherein the fields of medicine, handicraft and education offer a wider scope for his endeavours. Especially as a doctor has his work proved of value to the natives, and there can be no disagreement with the general proposition that in the capacity of medico he has exerted, and can still exert, humane and civilising influences. It is for reasons such as this that their good work in these outlandish spots may be accounted of assistance to the government, and they are looked upon by all the broader-minded Englishmen, if not

with any excess of enthusiasm, then with regard that certainly is not unfriendly.

In these far regions the entire male population follows the tenour of its ways destitute of any noticeable form of clothing, although occasionally adorned by divers beads and bangles, while amongst members of the tribe inhabiting the northern portion of the Upper Nile, large numbers are accustoming themselves to lengths of flowing cloth, always made of cotton, tied on one shoulder and depending just a little way below the other hip. This tribe is also armed with an imposing shield of "hippo" hide, an oval weapon nearly five feet long which gives a fine protection from an adversary's spear, imparting to the bearer, incidentally, an impression that is very picturesque. A curious fan-shaped coiffure imbues the wearer with becoming individuality, and out of all the tribes inhabiting the south these Shilluk warriors are immeasurably the most advanced and prepossessing.

The Shilluks, centred on the settlement of Kodok, the headquarters of the district, under the ægis of their "mek" or king, are making rapid progress in the material sphere with the assistance of a wise and helpful system of administration. Kodok is situated from Melut a one-day's journey south, and stands upon Fashoda's former site—spot of historic fame, the scene of Kitchener's encounter with the Frenchman Marchand during the early days of the Sudan's unsettled sovereignty. To this place we shall later come again—for the time being let us merely note the neatly ordered native dwellings forming the village lying back some half-mile from the bank, and in like manner the official buildings, which are the outward signs of white dominion as in the case of every such locality.

And so we move from Kodok on the southward

voyage. An ill foreboding darkening of the sky is seen to spread before us as we steam quietly away, and in a little while the landscape is obscured by sheets of falling rain which soon envelop everything in an impenetrable, hazy, mist, effectually preventing more than the most nebulous of views across the surrounding countryside. Such wider glimpses of the passing world as are vouchsafed to us only reveal a long monotony of grassy plain, which reaches from an indefinite horizon on either hand down to the river banks which, broken here by clumps of bush, and dotted there at intervals by certain trees, are also covered to the water's edge by heavy reeds that in some places absolutely hide from view what lies behind.

At nightfall we are still progressing thus, and the rain continues to descend in steady downpour upon Nile and plain, producing upon all a sense of wearying melancholy that finds a practical relief in games of bluff and chance in the saloon. Ere long, however, the protracted hooting of the steamer tells of her near approach to Malakal, and here one traveller is aware that his week's journey is to be counted at an end.

CHAPTER III

MALAKAL

No sooner is the steamer fastened to her moorings than a tall figure boards our craft through the abominable inclemencies of the dripping night (for overhead the unseen clouds still pour torrential rains upon the ground below, and underfoot are quagmire gods that exercise a baleful influence on the common way) and is soon on deck amongst the company of travellers who have assembled at the doors of the saloon for fleeting glimpses through the dismal pall of dark. Apart from the excited shouts of natives engaged upon the miserable task of moving goods amidst these sorry circumstances, and who in mean rags are busying themselves with their inhospitable work, no sound disturbs the onlookers save the incessant patter of the rain, descending in a way that brings to ears seeking symbolic harmonies in every note a hint of waves that rise and fall upon deserted shores ; and not a sight, save through the mysterious outlines of a dripping vegetation, the occasional flicker of a distant light.

“ Which is Assher ? ” asks he who has just come aboard. “ I’ve come to meet him.” And with these words he moves to greet the newcomer now only anxious to forsake the temporary domicile to which the exigencies of travel have confined him for the week now past, and seek ashore those new surroundings, scenes and labours, which of necessity the future holds in store for him.

So having bidden a farewell to my late travelling companions I go out into the lugubrious night, in company with my new-found mentor—out into the driving rain, and into the obscurity of an atmosphere heavily burdened with the scent of blooms and mixed with the strange odours of an origin as yet unknown to me that fill the air round human domiciles in distant climes like these. First up a slippery bank down which rivulets of water hurry precipitately towards the river, and then under the comparative shelter of some trees lining a bricked pathway to the garden of the governor's house, a profusion of dimly seen foliage over which there hang the gratifying fragrances of many natural perfumes. Once inside the double-doored partition of the mosquito-proof verandah, into which the rays of many oil lamps are diffusing softly radiant light, we doff our soaking weatherproofs, and with the tramp of sodden boots upon the well-tiled floor there comes the enquiring bark of a dog which, as we enter further into the house, precipitates itself upon us in the form of a large animal of questionable breed, to the accompaniment of gruff coughs directed at the newcomer, whose coming at this late hour of the night, under the tempestuous ægis of the storm, it doubtless is at pains to understand, save under the influence of a grave suspicion that is inherent in its kind. At this juncture there appear trained servitors of native breed to cater deftly to the wishes of their master, and soon kind gods are smiling down upon the pleasant ways of man.

I slept that night upon a camp bed furnished by my host, who in the absence of the province governor on home leave had temporarily assumed the mantle of authority and now was acting in his stead. In the morning I awoke to a clear perception of my new surroundings, for with the coming of the day the

rains had ceased, and a strong sun shone down at intervals through the slowly shifting clouds. It was agreeably cool outside, although this equable condition of affairs was not to be in evidence for long, as with the final passing of those clouds upon the following day there came that weakening, climatic phase induced by tropic sunshine beating down upon a countryside on which the heavens have only recently bestowed the fulsome generosity of their accumulated waters—the damp, intolerable and enervating heat that is alike the enfeeblener of the white man's body and the impairer of his mind.

The individual under whose guidance and in whose counsel I was to remain for a short time turned out to be a man of mildly interesting antecedents, for he had spent the greater portion of his mature existence in the capacity of tea and rubber planter in Ceylon, and the great fund of revelatory anecdotes which he was never weary of relating in connection with his previous life made him an interesting and enlightening comrade, though the obscenities with which he interspersed his conversation, coupled with the outpourings of a particularly crude and vulgar mind, frequently obscured the kindlier qualities of his nature in an atmosphere of quite unmitigated boredom.

At that time he was being made the subject of an epistolary bombardment by an unfortunate young white woman who had "got into trouble" with a native tribesman, and the affair provides a little picture of romance that is remarkable for even "darkest Africa." Employed in an indefinite capacity under the shelter of a local mission, this young person's presence may be accounted for as a result of rescue work by a society which purported to have reclaimed the hapless girl from her past life of careless gaiety in northern climes. In the belief that

her inherent weaknesses could only be controlled by her complete removal from the sphere to which she was accustomed, she was persuaded by her sponsors into this desolate retirement, and in due course she gravitated to these parts.

Amongst the aboriginal community that formed a throng of parasitical loiterers around the mission place was one "Wong"—a handsome youth according to the standards that apply to youths in Africa—and in the course of time the unadorned virility of this fine son of Adam came to affect the girl in such degree that she eventually fell a victim to his innocent appeal. But the poor wretch, fearful of the consequences likely to ensue from any plucking of the forbidden fruit, resisted the impetuous advances of his temptress with an assiduity all the more commendable in an untutored savage, until, as an inevitable result of her attentions, he fell finally to her endearing charms.

As soon as it was evident to the unhappy missionaries that a catastrophe of direful import was at hand, the authorities of the province (in the person of my colleague) were at once communicated with, and, on instructions from Khartoum, the erring maid was hurried off down-river to that place, accompanied by her beloved wooer, Wong. Once at his destination Wong was conducted to the local prison house, and there was much commotion in the dove-cotes of the government owing to this unprecedented thing. What was the final outcome for the luckless wretch I cannot say, but the frail mother, not content with the possession of her babe, laboured unceasingly in an endeavour to regain the comradeship of her barbarian mate. To this sole end she sent petitions to my colleague, in front of whom she had appeared before departing north, and in a chain of passionate appeals she urged him to approach the Central

Government in an attempt to win the freedom of her lover, Wong. Such was the bombardment that he now was suffering.

The devotion of my colleague to his dog was of a high order. Salvaged, as it were, from the precarious buffetings which are the inevitable lot of an unknown pariah, to be received under a white man's roof as his companion—a happy vagary of fortune that must be rare indeed amongst such animals, if ever there has been another so indulged—this favoured quadruped had taken a firm stand in the affections of his master and come in course of time to be an essential feature in the life of his establishment. Judged from the point of view of those accustomed to association with the better bred domestic canine, the dog possessed a host of failings and peculiarities, born of his undistinguished and uncertain origin, which had a powerful influence in alienating from him the inherent sympathies of cultured men. One of such failings was an exceptional ability for accumulating eager parasites, amongst which the ubiquitous and bulbous tick held prominence of place. Not that this trait itself was matter for remark, as there can be few creatures in such corners of the world free from attentions of the kind, but the activities to which the state gave rise deserved a more than ordinary condemnation. For during sundry hours of the day and night my colleague would engage in vigorous campaigns for the elimination of these parasites, uninfluenced either by locality or the occasion, and in the intervals between the courses of our meals he used to seize the opportunity to concentrate upon the work, which through its sheer effectiveness prevented full appreciation of the day's repasts. The animal which for a space experienced such a kind existence returned at last to the surroundings whence it had originally come ;

on the occasion of a visit to a certain wood station, during a journey when it was accompanying its master on a river trip, it disappeared into the bush and was not seen again, suffering no doubt some chance encounter with a beast of prey, or, with still greater probability, falling the victim of a local theft.

At the time of my first arrival in the province the acting governor was the only other white in Malakal, so that the opportunities I had for local survey were of an ample kind, as there was little work for me to undertake apart from the routine of office, nor were the possibilities of recreation very marked. The community consisted in the first place of a staff of clerks, chiefly Egyptian as to nationality, who, after mornings spent within the local offices (pisoners to ink-horn, manuscript and reed), were to be seen arrayed in native costume (known in the native tongue as "galabeah," and which bears close resemblance to the European nightgown) lounging in garden plots attached to unpretentious quarters, or lolling lazily on the verandahs of their rooms, in such a fashion as could but accentuate the general sloppiness of their appearance.

From amongst these gentry an interpreter was found for me, and it became his duty to impart to me the rudiments of arabic—a task which brought him gain financially and furnished him from time to time with relished opportunities for the discussion of his country's politics.

On the Egyptian officials as a whole it is unnecessary to dwell at length, for as remarked in earlier lines they were then necessary links in the machine of state, unhappy in these latitudes and in their enforced environment, praying to Allah that he speed the day when they return to more inviting lands. For the most part inoffensive and hard-working creatures, they yet lacked those qualities

of grit and courage which evoke respect and sympathy in any people, though in a full consideration of their race it must be borne in mind that for centuries before the arrival of the British, and Lord Cromer's rule, the Egyptians had been living as a race in bondage under the oppressor's heel, with millions toiling in a state of virtual slavery. Under such circumstances can it be wondered that the independence and virility of men have long been buried in the obscurity of ancient days?

The senior native at provincial headquarters, who as the Governor's right-hand man concerned himself with the affairs of the locality, dealing originally with matters in the station, was one of many placed formerly by circumstance in the Sudan, much to the detriment of native welfare, or at the best with no advantage to it, though at the same time oiling the smaller cogs of the administrative wheels and handling the petty details of routine.

This corpulent and prosperous-looking "Sagh"—to give him the abbreviated title of his rank—was a man who in common with his kind had many a blunted axe to grind. He did attain to some efficiency in his position, but being at the same time filled with ambitions in another sphere, his efforts were all temporarily concentrated on creating in his seniors, and in the Governor specially, an atmosphere conducive to his aims. Instructions given by British officials to such an individual must be conveyed with adequate discretion, for through desire to please at any cost, he is unlikely to allow the principles of abstract justice to deny him his success, should there be difficulties of any kind to mar his plans. His notions of the Law of Evidence, as practised in this country, were of a very sketchy kind, and he remained uninfluenced by the concepts of fair play during his frequent, normally successful efforts

to extract the necessary evidence connected with the host of petty charges that are continually originating in a place like this. As an example of his methods let me but quote this single instance. There had for some time been increasing evidence of an illicit still's existence in the native village, and after fruitless efforts to discover where it was installed, in which a crowd of agents strove to decoy the local populace into betraying whence their hilarious inspirations came, the sleuth so far succeeded in his quest as through a chance suspicion to light upon the persons most concerned. In a remarkably short space of time the breakers of the law were brought to book and, there being no defence, since the unfortunates did not deny their guilt, the star of a judicious zealotry descended on the "Sagh," surrounding him with an ephemeral halo. When afterwards congratulated on his work by a Commissioner who was at that time passing a few days in Malakal, and questioned as to the means he had employed in order to achieve such good results, he beamed the oily beam of his fraternity and a wide grin diffused his puffy features. "Ah, Sir," he said, in the voluptuous, deep-throated tone affected by the Egyptians speaking in their native tongue, "I warned the woman I knew all and if she confessed I would not tell, provided that she pointed out the still—and, lo, she confessed all, and I have brought the men also to judgment."

In the local field of medicine a Syrian doctor held sway. He was an outwardly obliging little man, and though living in a holy fear of the Governor seemed to perform his duties with a reasonable skill. He was a Nationalist, as might have been imagined, and though antagonistic to the British did not allow his pride to dominate his common-sense, and this was demonstrated in his attitude to the

existing occupation. "Yes," he would say, "we could no doubt rise as a people up in arms against you, and dispatch the greater part of you, but to what purpose would that be? You would then send a million others out from England and not a single thing could we then do." It was, perhaps, an inner consciousness of facts like these that finally dissuaded the Egyptians from the continuance of those acts of violence, as a means of obtaining their demands, that caused unsettlement throughout the land during the early twenties: yet are impassioned mobs but slowly moved by reason, and bouts of fury in untutored multitudes have ever run their course before that reason dawns. . . .

Although the total populace of Malakal does not attain great numbers, amounting at the most to a few hundred souls of different origin, the area covered by its slowly-growing town-site is not an inconsiderable one; fronting the right bank of the Nile for a length of certainly a mile it extends back inland for about half that distance. At the southern limit of the river frontage is the military camp, containing quarters for a black battalion, represented by a carefully planned allotment of thatched "tukls," various store buildings, the British officers' mess, and quarters for white and native officers. This camp covers a large area and borders on the garden of the Governor's house, which, however, is removed by a few hundred yards from the cantonments. Adjoining the Governor's house stands the senior Commissioner's, lying back some two hundred yards from the water's edge, and a space of a hundred and fifty yards separates these from the government offices, lodged in a long, one-storied edifice of brick, which runs at right angles to the river front and is distant from it only a few yards. Inland from these offices are found the houses of the native staff,

and behind these again is situate the native village, which in its multitude of hovels furnishes accommodation for quite a large community of Sudanese. The police lines form a prominent feature in this locality.

Near to the line of offices there stands the province store—a relic doubtless of the days of purely military rule. This building holds a motley crowd of articles, ranging from spear-heads, rope and calico to boots and shovels. From the wide range of its assorted paraphernalia the provincial police are all equipped, and stores provided as are required for general use in the out-stations. Here also is a great diversity of that emolument in kind in which the native tribes, not knowing any form of currency, are paid, and the place is frequently the last resort of not a few Commissioners frantically seeking the material wherewithal that will permit a rude administration of their unsettled districts.

Northward of offices and provincial store lies the native “suk”, or market—a locality where the community’s entire trade is carried on and the main street of which (if such a term may be applied to the mud way that separates the double line of booths and shops from one another) leads on towards the village and police lines. Distant from the Nile about a hundred yards, in prolongation of the street, there is a general provision store, managed by a pair of Greeks as agents for a merchant whose chief interests are centred in the north. These hapless exiles are engaged in catering for the wants of the Egyptian element and Arabs of the better class, filling a function of considerable utility, which is supported in a small degree by the few white men living in the station. Beyond the “suk” there stands the local hospital, a structure looking out upon the river and lying centrally in a wide open

space which fronts upon the Nile. Not far away, too, is the wireless station, while at the town-site's northerly extreme, one or two hundred yards beyond, the quarters of the Egyptian Irrigation staff, sheltered by clumps of trees that thrive in gardens tended with the scantiest care, form the last sign of habitation set as a bulwark up against the encroachments of the spacious plain.

Along the entirety of river frontage runs a tree-lined avenue, and other avenues have been laid out in places; some of these are profuse in arboreal decoration, while some but constitute the vistas that will in course of time become well-shaded ways throughout the neighbourhood; others indeed are only traced by long low lines of stumpy seedlings, which in the course of years will bless new dwellers in the land, and in their prodigality of leaves bear fitting witness to the men who set them on their way.

The hospital quarters as a rule furnish effective backgrounds for the embodiment of physical and social horrors. The native tribesmen and Sudānis, who with their wives and children make of its walls a temporary home, naturally change in entity and number all the time, but a small quota of unfortunates, afflicted by the scourges of the civilized or suffering from the crude diseases of mankind, may be seen daily herded into groups in their allotted class. As regards the purely savage elements, distinction is not made between the sexes, and they are lodged in wards which doubtless seem to them as palaces after the primitive accommodation which, in the form of grass-thatched huts, has always been their sole retreat. Squatting in corners, lying full-length upon the floor, hunched up like bundles at the bottom of the outer steps, or sprawling in positions peculiar to these tribes, they will regard their state with stoical indifference, suffering the most appalling

spear-wounds, loathsome boils and open sores, rotting flesh and other variations of the kind, without complaints or woe, seeming to realize the meaning of their maladies to much the same extent as some afflicted animal, and facing their lot with a placidity that is almost bovine.

The station's daily life calls for no special comment. Rarely does anything take place to mar the quiet routine of work, or the small commerce of its population. To the ambitious traveller a step ashore during a break in the long journey to the big game territory may bring a pleasant interlude and furnish interesting features in the scenes of native life always to be encountered in such spots as these, but for the servants of the government, compelled by force of circumstance to follow their allotted tasks in its restricted bounds and fill the common round amidst the vagaries of an infernal climate, the sameness of their life through uneventful months can be appreciated only by those few who have to bear its burden. Upon the other hand it must be owned that to an individual stationed in the outside districts, Malakal offers the not unwelcome prospect of an occasional short rest amidst surroundings not too harsh, and certainty of meeting with his kind, from whom he has, perhaps, been utterly removed for months on end; for even if his preference tends towards a solitary if eventful life far from his brethren, it is of benefit to him that he from time to time return to civilizing influences and suffer these to freshen his mentality, which in the course of dwelling with barbarians amid the soulless plains and thorn-spiked bush he has allowed to sink unconsciously into a deepening groove.

There are no roads outside the site of Malakal, and as the countryside immediately surrounding it turns in the rainy season into a vast morass covered in man-high grass, the river still remains the most

important means of journeying to the outside world, for native paths that lead from place to place along the banks are fitted only for the men who by their comings and their goings have created them. Of late years an aeroplane landing-ground has been maintained in the vicinity, but for the present this may be regarded more in the light of military provision than as a contribution to the local transport scheme.

In so far as river transport is concerned, this problem has been fairly satisfactorily solved by the two province steamers, which are on hire from the Central Government for local use. One of these is the Governor's gun-boat. Originally it was armed with a six-pounder mounted in a turret, but this has since been substituted by machine-guns. The "Hafir" ("Guardian"), as she is called, is used as needed by the Governor, but she is also frequently employed by the Commissioners when travelling on specific duties such as tax collection and the like. Prior to her assignment to the regions of the Upper Nile, the steamer had seen service further north and was employed among the river boats in the old days of the Sudan campaigns, being still one of the most speedy craft available upon the Nile. As for the second vessel, she is used as the occasion needs by the Commissioners and has been named "Shabluka"—long since abbreviated into the appropriate substitute of "Shabby Loo," a title which the dilapidations of the boat's exterior and the parlous state of her interior has richly earned for her.

Beloved Shabby-loo! How many a clammy night have I not spent upon your cockroach-troubled bunk, or in your riddled "namooseya"¹ how many an ill-starred fight have I not waged against the invading insect hosts! Have you not wooed me with the

¹ A mosquito-proof shelter.

whisperings of your tireless stern as we moved gently forward through the muddied waters of the Nile on our Imperial quest. Frail creature! Have I not walked your sodden deck in hours of darkness after the sudden fury of the wild "hubboob"¹ has struck your windward contours, fearing your inclination, dreading lest under the impassioned courting of the tempestuous waters you desert me and I be hurled a prey to the avenging crocodile, the while you sleep upon the river-bed untroubled by the storm? Aye! Shabby-loo! Amongst your chosen lovers I have known you well; may the great god of Rivers grant your grey timbers safety from his wrath!

Although the tribesmen travel frequently on these provincial steamers, whenever opportunity occurs and they have shown the genuineness of their claims upon accommodation (for without this proviso every barge would soon become a travelling circus) it must not be imagined that they themselves do not engage in any form of navigation. In actual fact considerable use is made by them of quaint canoes, which they will paddle about from place to place, generally keeping fairly close in to a bank and shunning mid-stream save when compelled by force of circumstance to cross it. This canoe is always fashioned from the trunk of a fruit-bearing palm-tree common to these parts and which is very fibrous in consistency. Having secured a piece of wood from twelve to eighteen feet in length, these craftsmen scoop out its middle crudely with a spear-head, and after simple shaping of the two extremities the finished article is then available for use. No seats are made, and with the thing propelled by means of wooden paddles, the usual posture of the operators is a kneeling one. Rarely are more than two men seen together in a canoe, and even yet more rarely

¹ A tropical storm.

is a woman seen in it, either as paddler or as passenger. Being of fibrous composition these small vessels have not a great resistance to the water, and baling periodically is a necessity on all but the most brief of journeys, especially in the case of old and water-logged canoes.

To return once more to the routine of daily life for a Commissioner in Malakal, as typified on the occasion of his visits to the station, and as was witnessed by the writer during the early days of his initiation in that place. The official office hours, as in the case of all the settled regions in the north and south, extend from nine o'clock in the morning till one o'clock in the afternoon, or, should necessity demand, to a still later hour. The main principle involved is to arrange for the completion of the daily work in, so to speak, a single sitting, thus allowing for retirement during the most trying period of the day, and for exercise when that has passed away. At a place like Malakal the work is largely regulated by the periodicity of arrival of the monthly boats; there is an avalanche of correspondence to be attended to following the advent of the steamer from Khartoum, and concentrated efforts are required shortly before the steamer leaves upon its northward voyage. At other times, local affairs will chiefly occupy the working hours of a white official. These may well vary in importance from the disposal of a murder case to the routine inspection of the hospital (with no white doctor present) and sundry visits to all quarters of the station for purposes of general scrutiny. Rarely indeed a morning passes without a host of petty cases being brought before the Governor's assistant (for such a visiting Commissioner becomes) and a long stream of "mazlumin"¹ continually files past in front of him, to the

¹ Persons with a complaint.

interruption of the routine work on which he is, perhaps, engaged. Outside the offices, small groups of garrulous litigants await their promised turn, and some uncouth primordials, clad specially for the nonce in borrowed rags, mingle with outraged virgins and afflicted wives until the time has come for the recital of their woes.

To each D.C., in his capacity as magistrate under the penal code of the Sudan, there are accorded certain powers of summary conviction, but in the cases which involve a larger issue, such as murder, manslaughter, rape and so on, a court of three is always formed. Murder is no uncommon act in this deserted corner of the world. Every Sudāni bears a knife, and if a heated altercation should arise between opposing parties nothing is simpler than that there should be resort to such a weapon, and if no strong and disinterested party be at hand it is inevitable that blood should flow. As a result of the hot-blooded temperament of these dark peoples, murders precipitated in this fashion are not avenged as is the drastic way with murderers in civilised communities, and if a man's death result from wounds inflicted in a fight, a punishment of two years' penal servitude will generally meet the case. In the case of killings amongst savage tribes, who are not yet within the jurisdiction of the S.P.C. in matters that concern disputes between themselves, and who are dealt with after their own rites and customs, the efforts of the government are directed towards the enforcement of the local usages, which in the case of murder always take some simple form of "blood-money".

After a week or two in these surroundings I undertook a tour of cursory inspection with my colleague, during the course of which we visited some scattered posts and stations, and I was able to explore for the

first time the lower reaches of the Bahr El Zeraf,¹ that long diversion of the Nile which leaves the swamps surrounding the main stream in the vicinity of Shambe. For rising as it does in those vast swamps, which are themselves dependent on the overflow of the Bahr El Jebel,² the term of tributary cannot rightly be ascribed to this subsidiary stream which flows along a separate bed for some two hundred miles before it joins the Nile again near Tonga. Owing to the great length of waterway that intersects the area of the province there is not one where river transport plays a like rôle in its administration, combining as it does efficiency of operation and facility in supervision over wide territories, with travel comfort which in such regions cannot be surpassed.

It is of course not frequently that journeys of the kind are undertaken, and when they are then it is only by those individuals whose work may lie in districts where the various rivers flow, for there is much administration to be carried out in areas distant from the Nile or any of its tributaries or "khors." Suffice it that when such opportunities occur they give the pleasantest of interludes—guns, stores and servants are packed lock, stock and barrel on the boat, and as unquestioned ruler of his present destiny the favoured traveller may seek alike in unembarrassed ease the warring tribe and peaceful tribute payer.

There is no great diversity of scene between Malakal and the mouth of the Zeraf, which in fact bears a resemblance to the countryside south of the forest areas of Renk, and which continues to the opening of the Nile, about a hundred miles from

¹ Giraffe River.

² River of the Mountain—term applied to the upper reaches of the White Nile in the Sudan.

Malakal, known as Lake No, and where the region of the "Sudd"¹ begins.

Lying a few hours' steam from Malakal is Taufikia, the site of former province headquarters which were abandoned for the present station after a visit by the Duke of Connaught several years ago. The place was always flooded out at certain periods of the rains, and malaria was a greater scourge amongst the population than has proved the case in the new centre, where, under efficient measures, the incidence of this, insidious disease is being rapidly reduced. The frames and skeletons of old buildings are to be seen in derelict condition here beside the native quarters of a former day, but those in actual occupation of this site are limited to a few caretakers and native gardeners, together with a small staff borne on the strength of "Posts and Telegraphs". For it is here the superintendent of the local telegraphs has made his headquarters—one where his presence rarely shines, since he is forced to spend the greater portion of his time in journeys to and fro along the Nile. A motor-boat with cabin and mosquito-proof retreat has been rigged up for him, and in this somewhat perilously top-heavy craft he covers an immense mileage in the confines of the territory allotted to his care. The telegraphic system in this part follows the river banks, and though access to them is thus made as easy as could be in such a country, the amount of supervision and repair work that is entailed in proper maintenance of it burdens this solitary official with considerable responsibility. Apart from heavy rains and windstorms, and the inroads of such creatures as giraffes, which seem unable to discern the line (a single one), the local tribes are sources of incessant interruption to the

¹ Swampy lands on either side of the Nile, lined by vast areas of immensely tall grasses which completely obliterate a view across the plain.

working of the system in remoter parts, and notably upon the upper reaches of the Bahr El Zeraf. Prizing as they do the copper wire in use, sundry savages will make a raid upon the line from time to time and decamp with lengths of the much valued prize, which they employ for binding purposes, the fashioning of bangles and of anklets, or for the many other purposes of a like character. It is no easy task to penalise these pilferers, who will descend on points that may be many miles apart. The difficulty lies in the time required to prosecute an adequate investigation in distant spots—it may be several days after the event has taken place—and the game is hardly worth the candle generally, for the Commissioner involved might well be separated from many more important duties for an unconscionable time unless he chanced to be within the neighbourhood. Swift justice is thus rarely feasible, but the offenders are quite often brought to book eventually, either by diplomatic questionings or by the summary punishment of the nearest clan.

The P.O. official engaged upon the maintenance of the telegraphs on the Upper Nile during my service there was a sergeant of the Engineers, seconded from the British Army for this special work, with terms of service based on the same main principles as those applying to the British officers. On the occasions when we encountered one another he was an excellent companion to me, and his considerable skill as a shikari was not the least amongst his personal assets, having within the scope of his wide range of operations endowed him with a multitude of fine game heads and other trophies of the chase. The quantity of ivory taken by this veteran during the course of his ten years in one of the finest big-game areas of the world must have assuredly attained a formidable total, and, though himself possessed of sporting

instincts, his phenomenal success in this direction proved to be cause for no small heartburning in the breasts of men less fortunately placed. His proclaimed ambition after retirement from the service, for which these years of practically untrammelled freedom had now quite unfitted him, was to become the owner of a public-house at Aldershot with, I believe, a cinema attached to it. The billiard-room of this Elysian tavern was to be the glory of the town, and on its walls there were to hang the serried ranks of antelopes that would thereafter be a silent witness to his former days; and with his contours roundly moulded by the passing years, I see him settled in the comfortable rôle of host and potman, which I have not a doubt he fills with as felicitous success as his original activities occasioned.

Taufikia is distinguished by the wealth of palm trees with which it has been dowered through the foresight of its founders. Without this natural embellishment the place would be a wilderness indeed, but as it is the locality presents a not unpleasing aspect, forming a landmark in a region otherwise devoted to the interminable reeds and grasses of a prodigious plain.

Not many hours' journey up-stream from Taufikia lies the mouth of the Sobat river, which here joins the Nile after a tortuous course from the recesses of the Abyssinian hills. On beyond this we reach a small police post, under the charge of an old native warrant officer, and to this reference may be expected at a later stage. And then Tonga, a sub-district (marmuria) administered by a "mamur"—just a small gathering of native huts a little distance from the river bank and graced with a few small buildings, which include a post office. There is a rough road leading thence towards Talodi, capital of the adjoining Nuba Mountains province, and situated inland

at an approximate distance of a hundred miles; and over this there runs a regular motor service, carrying passengers and freight, that is no doubt responsible for the few arab merchants who have established themselves at Tonga. About an hour's journey on beyond again we pass the mouth of the Zeraf, which meets the main stream from due south, and, like the Sobat, intersects its eastern bank. The Zeraf is famous for its game associations, and through the dry season of the year, when the grass which overruns the surrounding plains has either been dried up or else burnt down by natives, and when all inland pools have given up their final drops of water to a burning sun, its banks are rich in many fauna forced by the exigencies of nature to the river, which is then blessed with opportunities for hunting probably unparalleled in the Sudan. It was an undeserved accession of good fortune that was eventually to give me the dominion over this wide territory with the magnificent shooting its administration offers to the Commissioner concerned.

At the time of this first introduction to my future zone the rains were virtually at their height, for it was then mid-August, and as it happened I was not to see the countryside again in such luxuriant setting. For when the rains have decked the countryside in a prodigality of brilliant green, when level plains are carpeted by tall rank grasses reaching to a height of eight feet or yet more, and clumps of bush are crowned with many shaped bouquets of tangled foliage which with their fierce entwinements of tenacious creepers only allow restricted views across this sea of lavish vegetation, then of a surety from the point of view of one who has once seen the landscape under the vault of an unclouded sky, after a drought extending over several months, the scene is difficult to recognize. And what a galaxy of

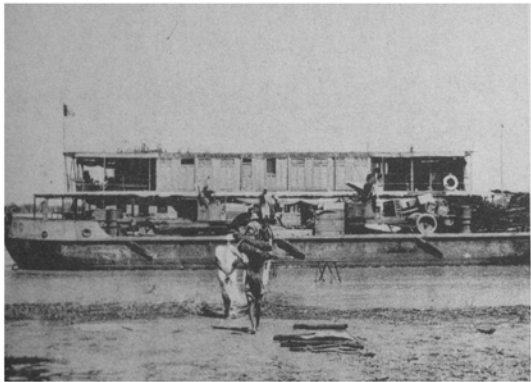
bird-life greets the eye of him who scans the richly-coloured banks passing in close review before the steamer as she winds her way along the river's tortuous course! A myriad denizens of the feathered world, flitting with easy grace from stem to stem and branch to branch, impart a liberality of coloured beauty to the serried walls of gently waving grass amidst the bounds of which they find a happy playground. The manifold adornments of these little creatures, signally edifying to the human beings fortunate enough to be a witness of the prospect, offer a marvel meet for thought and wonder, the more so as with the finish of the mating season the display is once again renounced for covering of a more sober hue. Innumerable shades of green, red and yellow, purple, brown and blue, liven the verdant foreground of the river banks, while the surrounding air, filled with the twittering choruses of radiant families, swells to a note of high-pitched harmony.

Disposed at intervals are breaks in the low plain of forest country, and here nothing but an expanse of grassy plain will meet the eye of an observer on the deck, for he can now look out across a sea of endless green that stretches far away to the horizon. The steamer's progress at this season rarely reveals the sight of any large game animals, for the majority have long since moved away to the interior; upon the other hand, infrequent glimpses of that common breed, the Waterbuck, may be obtained amidst the tall, rank grass, for this kind does not leave its river haunts for any length of time.

And so to Fangak, the headquarters of another sub-district within the territory of the Dinka tribe, a people markedly inferior to the Shilluks both in attainments and morale. Here is the usual gathering of "tukls" filled with the native medley always

associated with these central sites. There is a wood station close at hand, and as is the case with similar localities the place may be relied upon for good supplies of chickens, milk and eggs.

This is the end of that small picture which it had been my slight endeavour to portray as I set out again in retrospect to seek the scenes of my first visit to the countryside of the Zeraf, showing perhaps a few of those more common sights that are the everyday experience of a man who makes the trip. For at this point we turned again to Malakal, there to abide a little while before the Governor's return from annual leave, and I, with such, to meet a man whose sole authority was for a space to be my mainstar, and towards whom I was predestined to conceive a very definite affection.



(A) STEAMER AND BARGE AT WOOD STATION.
(B) WOOD-STATION.
(C) MULE CARTS, MALAKAL.

CHAPTER IV

LIFE IN OUT-STATIONS

With one solitary exception, the headquarters of the districts in the U.N.P. were at this time situated on a river, and thus Commissioners were normally within a three-days' journey of the province capital, although allowance must be made in this connection for the more or less approximately equal time required for the steamer's voyage from Malakal to each locality.

It is but natural that the work of a D.C. should so demand his time as under ordinary circumstances to preclude his visiting the other districts, but opportunities will come from time to time, as, for example, on the formation of a specially appointed court destined to hold its sittings in a certain post or station, or when (as will frequently occur throughout the rains) the absence of a certain individual on leave necessitates a general supervision of his territorial sphere by one or other of his British colleagues.

Amongst the various journeys of initiation which in my early days of service I was afforded profitable opportunity to undertake was one along the Sobat river, in connection with activities that were mainly medical and to which political considerations were subordinate. For periodically there is a wave of smallpox through the native tribes, who in the past have suffered heavy losses to their numbers owing to the unchecked ravages of the disease.

The primitive nature of these afflicted peoples is not conducive to the eradication of the scourge, but nevertheless the government has experienced great success in its ameliorative campaigns, in which a general vaccination plays the major rôle. The efficacy of these campaigns was demonstrated several years ago much to the satisfaction of the authorities and natives too, but confidence in the disinterested mission of the government was of slow growth until the incidence of a particularly virile outbreak amongst a tribe comparatively well acquainted with the administration enabled the final banishment of lingering doubt amongst a crowd of harassed creatures. The situation now is that on the appearance of any smallpox in a locality, a prompt appeal is sent to province headquarters, and the sufferers congregate in thousands to any promised point of ministration. The difficulty—a natural one under the circumstances—is to induce the tribes to undergo treatment before the actual outbreak has occurred; when this takes place many are quickly lost because their powers of resistance are of a feeble kind. In circumstances which preclude the presence of a doctor, the work of vaccination falls to the lot of native operators who, after a brief training by the province medico, may be considered fit to carry out their task with expedition and dispatch.

A visit for a purpose of this kind had been included in the items of this Sobat trip, and having travelled without incident along the course of that important tributary, which passes through a countryside identical in features with the main Nile stream, we reached a place called Abwong, which is the river base for the administration of the territory known as Lau and is inhabited by a sub-division of the Nuer tribe—to which there will be ample reference at a later stage.

Abwong is an attractive little spot, basing its chief claim to local prominence upon the excellence of a progressive garden initiated some years back with laudatory foresight, and which now supplies both fruit and vegetables galore to all the folks at Malakal, whose needs in this direction through the greater portion of the year are always in excess of the available supply.

It was here that I was first vouchsafed the curious spectacle of tribal vaccination, when men and women in their hundreds, and in varying states of nudity, filed past the medical assistant who accompanied us.

The actual business is a simple one—just a quick dab upon the patient's forearm by a perspiring pseudo-medico, grasping a piece of disinfected cotton-wool with which he cleans a patch upon the skin, and then the one so treated, passing along towards the chief performer working at the other's side, receives the hypodermic syringe in the part prepared for it, when he moves off and quits the line of patients standing jabbering in the sun. The major actors in this little drama occupy themselves beneath the shelter of a widely branching tree, but the long row of natives waits its tardy progress unprotected from the blazing sky. Not, indeed, that it can easily affect the host of swarthy mortals gathered here, and who beyond this line of reasonable order form into groups that fluctuate with the exigencies of passing whims. Here are assembled the youth, age, bravery and fear of a but poorly disciplined fraternity—a conglomeration of primordial factions, gaping in Adam's mantle on the wonders of to-day. Lithe, lean-flanked braves, whose only acquisitions since their birth lie in the crudely fashioned spears which, with their long shafts resting on the ground, furnish supports for their proprietors; old, wizened

men, whose spears are but the emblem of a former day; young virgins whose artistic nakedness well suits the bronze-like statuary of their entrancing forms; a corps of well-wooded matrons whose irregularly shaped figures, garbless save for the small three-cornered flap of sheep-skin hanging from their waists in front and rear, offers a crude if certain indication of impending incident; and well-worn hags of pitiable and cringing mien whose shrivelled dug and shrunken features only too forcibly portray the ravages of ceaseless toil—these in their numberless variety provide a feast of human pageantry the like of which is never met in kindlier climes.

Within an unimportant distance of Abwong some Protestant missionaries have built a station on the river; as we pass by a few barbarians may be seen lounging listlessly about the precincts of the place—clad in the specious rolls of cloth which the protagonists of Christianity have foisted on them. And so to Nasser, focus of regions filled with scattered subdivisions of the Nuer tribe, headquarters of a civil district, and the location of a military post formed as a local base for other posts distributed throughout a territory as yet not properly subdued. The civil station is divided from the post by a few hundred yards and lies, moreover, on the opposing river bank. The provision of a house for the Commissioner has long since placed it in the sphere of “settled” districts, although the application of this term must not here be allowed to influence the uninitiated into a pardonable misapprehension of its real significance. By way of fair corollary it may be added that the greater portion of the territory filling the southern areas of the U.N.P. may be included in that class just in so far as absence of aggression is concerned; passive resistance of the natives, nevertheless, to any form of tax or cattle tribute has the effect of giving those

responsible for its collection a qualified conception of the phrase employed. During the period of the rains a house of some kind is essential for the comfort of a European, and—*a fortiori*—to his health, for, quite apart from the tempestuous storms, the attentions of mosquito hosts that multiply with every shower would quickly make his life intolerable had he no form of insect-proof retreat. This question of mosquitos yearly confronts the white man and the black alike during the season of the rains, which in intensity and suddenness do not in any way belie the usual character of equatorial storms. While hardly noticeable at all during dry weather, owing to the general lack of water-pools wherein the generations breed, these pests are the chief blot on living in the south through the remaining portion of the year, being responsible for such a great degree of physical discomfort, and the preponderance of malarial fever, as to require for most men frequent change of station to the north Sudan where plagues of this description are unknown. Mosquitos are but insects of the night, and without adequate protection in the form of gloves and thigh-boots life in the open after dark would be intolerable. When travelling steamerwise precautions of this sort become a virtual necessity. By daytime, also, on the rare occasions when compelled by circumstance to enter the long grass for sport or other purposes, one may rely upon becoming speedily the prey of concentrated insect hordes disturbed as they lie hidden from the sun throughout the day. If unprotected, ankles, arms and face will be subjected to most furious onslaughts, as was the case with me on one occasion, when I had been seduced by guinea fowl on to the river bank, and which I am not likely to forget. The work of those commissioners whose districts must involve a deal of travelling is mainly carried out through the dry period of the year, when

grass is not and standing pools are few, if they exist at all.

That representative of British rule who had dominion over the far-flung territory surrounding Nasser was but a passing servant of the government. Joining the Army in the course of the late war, he had abandoned a small post at home to rise from private to lieutenant-colonel in the swift fashion of the battlefield. At the conclusion of hostilities he had cast round for occupation, and in the course of time had been accepted in the capacity in which I first encountered him. There was about him a suggestion of the manner best defined by repetition of the slogan "And the next please!" though this did not detract one whit from his efficient industry, concerning which there was no doubt. His anxiety for a continuance of unstrained relations with the governor did harm to no one and was a source of quiet amusement to a few; he was entirely frank upon the subject of his immediate aim, which was the steady building up of his finances (greatly assisted through the receipt of a most generous salary) with a view to subsequent retirement from the service and the commencement of speculation on the Stock Exchange. In the meantime, as a bachelor, he lived a frugal life, which in this part it is not very difficult to do, being removed from all amusement of an expensive kind. Eventually this comic, unoffending sportsman, under the influence of an impending leave to England, spoke of the sweet unmarried bliss to be his lot at home, where a fond mistress was awaiting him together with her babes.

Like most of these out-stations, Nasser is not without its usual squad of prisoners, who in the expiation of their crimes against the local laws are to be seen in simple nakedness chained each to each in pairs by means of metal rings attached above their

ankles. Although presenting a mediaeval and inquisitorial spectacle to unaccustomed eyes, it is not long before it dawns on one that as an actual fact such measures are devised for the offender's benefit, and nothing else. He is convinced of the futility of flight, admittedly facilitated in the rains by the long grass swamping the countryside around the station, and so avoids the probability of death or wounding at his escorts' hands, when seeking to escape.

Practically opposite the civil post at Nasser, on the far river bank, another mission station may be seen. This is administered by two Americans, man and wife, who were established several years ago in the locality, and have become the best-known characters outside official circles in the province; though with the exception of the Governor and the Commissioner at Nasser acquaintance with the pair is more through hearsay than encounter as they but rarely leave the mission site.

A short way up-stream lies the military post, and here I came across the British officer who in his lonely sphere is charged with its command. The quarters occupied by him in one of those strange outposts of the Empire, concerning which there is so much brave prattle but so little general knowledge, consisted of a locally constructed house of mud with a thatched roof to which there had been added a mosquito-proof retreat for use at night. The "house" fulfilled its greater rôle in the safe harbouring of stores, which were piled up beneath its shelter in haphazard style. Comfort was thus entirely absent from the habitation, which did in fact no more than travesty a European dwelling. The occupant, however, seemed to be satisfied with his environment, to which no doubt he was now tolerably accustomed. The native lines, erected in the open, were not so far away, with nothing else at hand except the rush-lined Sobat banks, an

unevenly spaced grove of trees lying outside the house up-stream, and the monotonous and irksome vista of the slowly moving flood. Seated beneath the overhanging thatch we lunched with all the prodigality afforded by a variety of tinned provisions assisted by the previous acquisitions of a shot-gun over neighbouring ground, and in the care-free harmony of men assembled in a spot so far removed from normal walks of life, discoursed in playful leisure on the small intricacies of government that are the natural heritage of these forsaken parts. It may perhaps seem strange, in this entirely uninviting corner of the globe, where the ascendancy of man has such a narrow margin over the exuberance of Nature (Dame)—and only then in the restricted spaces claimed for habitation—that in the life of a young Englishman charged with the proper maintenance of law and order over a wide, unsettled area, of all the many local problems claiming his attention not the least pressing is to be found in the impetuous infidelity of his own soldiers' wives. Ah! My good friends, well may you smile on this—Eve hath her victory in Afric's tropic clime no less renowned than those on cooler shores! And so our host's complaint that of all the troubles that beset his small community, what proved the most disturbing to the general equanimity was the inconstancy of those whose masters were compelled from time to time to form reliefs for the advanced posts of the district.

These Abyssinian border posts require a periodical change of personnel, after the normal wont of such-like garrisons which it is out of the question to provide with married lines, owing to the additional accommodation that would be necessary, to the enlargement of supplies, and to the likely greater insecurity of tenure that their presence might involve. Experience has shown that only the application of measures that

would be abhorrent to the civilised can be relied upon to prove a strong enough deterrent to the erring spouses of the local "soldiers at the war", and as the fearful husbands all concur, this old-time system of uxorial retribution has to be looked upon as an effective counter in the firm maintenance of harmony within the absent warriors' homes. They stand no nonsense in a matter of this kind upon the Abyssinian border—*autres places, autres moeurs*. . . .

A farewell look to the Sobat river as we attain once more its placid confluence with the Nile, and with the passing of those native scenes provided by its river banks, bear swiftly down on former pastures, through familiar scenery, never again to seek the prospect of its countryside nor linger on its peaceful course.

Returned once more to the provincial focus, there were for me a few days of association with the Governor, and during these this personality provided my first insight into a character which soon furnished scope for very interesting studies. A tall and sinuous man, possessed of firmly-moulded features and imposing mien, he had developed a theatricality of manner that went far to meet the popular conception of his kind. While seemingly unconscious of this strong proclivity, embodied as occasion came by a variety of forceful gestures, many Napoleonic in their style, this man's presence and his general bearing were more symbolical of dictatorial power than those of any other individual it has been my lot to meet. There is no shade of doubt that this impressive figure had in effect a strong appeal to all the many types peopling the province, and from the hearts of none too loyal Egyptian clericals brought out a sane respect which at the least did not assist in weakening their discipline. A very keen regard for the importance and responsibility of his position did not diminish

these effects, and there were times when climaxes of gubernatorial ostentatiousness provided scenes that might have been embodied in some stirring melodrama. Punctual to a meticulous degree, it was an edifying sight to see him stride majestically along the gang-plank to his steamer deck, to receive the quivering salute of slouching minions gathered at the water-side, and acknowledge the brisk martial greeting of his "rais"¹ who was awaiting him upon the river-bank to which the boat was moored. No sooner safe on board than, striking an attitude of imperialistic splendour, as he looked down upon the untutored hordes standing in groups along the frontal avenue that lines the Nile, and typifying all the peoples of his far-flung realm, with a majestic sweep of his right arm he would express his wish to move off instantly with a decision and an equanimity that had about them all the signs of an irrevocable decree. In the event of any dereliction of duty on the part of some unhappy miscreant during the course of operations in which he was himself concerned, the shadow of an awful majesty would take possession of his features, and in a voice trembling with emotion he would pronounce some words of doom upon the luckless wrong-doer, pointing the object of his judgment out with an expressively extended arm. "Take him away!" the Raj would boom in calculating accents not rendered magisterial the less through his employment of the native tongue; and away the wretched miscreant would be borne towards such temporary shackles on his freedom as the locality possessed. The Governor was, in fact, a modern representative of old-time gubernatorial traditions. As against this outward show of personal authority, however, there must be set a definite susceptibility to the influence of his subordinates on points of local policy, especially

¹ The steamer's skipper.

where his own comfort or convenience were concerned. It cannot be denied that consideration for such things played an important part in his activities, detracting not so much from the efficiency of the administration, or the well-being of his Commissioners, as from the esteem in which the latter held him, poisoning the judgment of the official world with which he came in contact. It was related of him that as a younger man, and bachelor, his star had shone with brilliance everywhere—a generous fellow, and a notable athlete—but with the assumption of a governorship and matrimonial ties he had thereafter been consumed with a strong passion for economy, carrying it to such a far degree that, if it was blameless in its principles, did not accord with the accepted standard of the officials' living prevalent in most parts of the Sudan. Like many other men, he was himself his greatest enemy, but when I make this reference to a characteristic trait, as an example of the tendency that may be fostered by a long stay in lonely parts, I do so with a full appreciation of the things involved and in no serious vein of criticism against one for whom I have affectionate esteem. Imbued with the profoundest sense of justice, animated by a high regard for the responsibilities of his service, and zealous in maintaining the traditions which, though still comparatively young, it had acquired, he was successful in upholding an effectual rule under a mass of difficulties seeming to be but little realized within the dove-cotes of the Central Government, and filling his place with fitting dignity and honour. Others there doubtless are who carry burdens similar to his, and often greater ones, through the far confines of our wide Imperial sphere, and these with varying equanimity pursue their allotted spans of destiny towards predestined goals, glad in the unruffled faith that dominates their labours, and

seeking mainly the accomplishment of duty. Amongst such stood this man.

It was about this time that there arose the need for a commissioners' triumvirate at Renk to bring one of the cashiers to trial on charges of embezzlement. With this in view, and having due regard to the fresh opportunity afforded me of further insight into province work, I am despatched, after my return from Nasser, upon a round of duties to the river stations in the north, accompanied by the lately acting-Governor. The first point of call is Kodok—this entails disposal of some native cases which, owing to the D.C.'s temporary absence, have been accumulating for about three months, and now demand investigation. As mentioned previously, the tribe inhabiting this section of the country are the Shilluks, who represent the most progressive elements amongst the province aborigines. It is at Kodok that their king or "Mek", has been installed, and a gradually increasing tribal conscience is growing up around him, shaped by the gentle influences of authority as represented by the resident Commissioner. Vested with certain judiciary functions in affairs of purely tribal interest, the "Mek" has for some time been exercising definite dominion over his own people, who look upon him now with admiration and respect. Possessed of a magnificent physique and manly bearing, he is, despite a savage origin, to be adjudged a far from negligible power in the land, and is relied upon to raise the standard of his tribe towards a goal as yet but dimly adumbrated. The one essential point in dealing with the progress of such folk lies in a policy of non-interference with their internal life, and in avoiding all attempts to press on them the principles accepted by the civilised, but which as yet are lacking in appeal to them. Evolution, ever gradual, can but be sought for from within, even though

regulated from without, for in default of this disruption must inevitably ensue. With the increasingly successful civilising of this tribe there were some little while ago suggestions for the conscription of its younger men ; this came, of course, from an authority at headquarters casting its tentacles around for suitable material for its motley force. Had such a move been entertained, even despite its feasibility, the work of long, laborious, and uncertain years would have been dashed to pieces at a single blow.

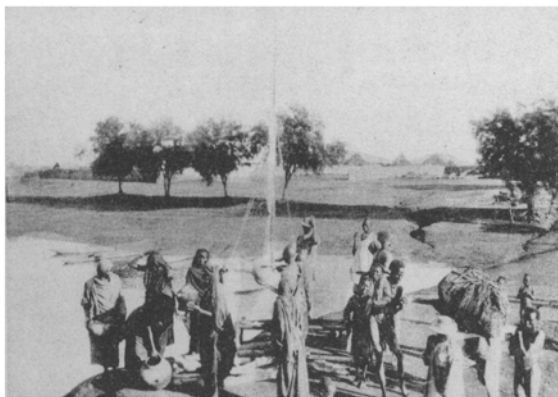
Despite the lack of all outstanding features that might serve to differentiate it from its many counterparts along the Nile, there lingers around Kodok a certain atmosphere of quiet fascination which is due primarily to the general semblance of prosperity affected by the inhabitants, and the solidity of its important native village—to which an air of consequence imparted to the place by a variety of government buildings adds not a little, due to the contrast they afford with the surrounding mass of habitation that is purely African. Believed to be the first established settlement within this corner of the world, the neighbourhood has this advantage over its sister stations in the province in that there has long since accrued to it the benefit of former horticultural enterprises, for it is decked with a diversity of trees and palms that now go far towards imbuing it with a specific character.

Owing to the incorporation of the principles of monetary exchange into the Shilluks' daily life, and to its proximity to Malakal, Kodok affords some scope to Arab traders, who may be relied on to appear at any point where the activities of commerce are made possible, and it is also the headquarters of the mounted police force, a band of men who in the event of due necessity can be employed in an entirely military capacity.

This force is one of most considerable utility, and under normal circumstances is used in rounding up the local miscreants, defaulting sheikhs, or parties such as those from whom the extraction of the annual tribute has become a task beyond the power of the foot police, whose equipment ill befits them for the apprehension of a man who, having nothing in the world except his wives and cattle, may well be here to-day and gone to-morrow. The country being quite impassable throughout the rains, their employment is of course confined to the dry season, when they are usually allotted to Commissioners whose scattered districts call for additions to the normal complement of foot police at their command.

Melut was at this time under the charge of a "mamur" of mainly Turkish origin. The only plaint against this highly capable official came through an excess of administrative zeal, which in a forceful combination with the proclivities of all his race had drawn him into a campaign of ruthlessness that had become a menace to the local peace. It was but natural therefore, that the arrival of a visiting Commissioner should coincide with a presentation of petitions from the local traders against some of his decisions, and many of his actions, which proved to be of singularly high-handed character. Although undoubtedly of an exceptional degree on this particular occasion, it was by no means otherwise exceptional as an example of the trouble caused by native underlings when left alone for any length of time. In actual fact these "mamurs" have been a thorn in the administration's side since the necessity arose for a subordinate to undertake a station's routine work. Employed at province or at district headquarters they are at least under supervision, but in the stations having no Commissioner in residence, where they have local charge, it may be counted on that

A)



B)



(A) KODOK LANDING STAGE.

(B) AT MELUT.

(C) LANDING-STAGE, KODOK.

definite irregularities at times occur, and very difficult it is to estimate the extent of those occurring but that cannot be removed through lack of evidence. As an example of the light in which official posts were oft regarded by the staff of province clerks, from amongst whom, in days now past, certain selections had to be made from time to time with a view to their later undergoing training in a "mamur's" duties, the case may now be cited of a feeble and apologetic son of Egypt, who forwarded the Governor a long-winded screed, supported by the "Sagh", in which he gave as the sole reason for his own selection for a "mamur's" post the devastating plea of burdens matrimonial, saying he had a large and, it would seem, increasing family to cater for, mentioning also an aged female relative, and adding that his endeavours towards this end were proving fruitless. That certain force of personality, and independent spirit, and the capacity for dealing with the natives were to be sought for as essentials in any applicant for such a post he had not for a moment entertained, and when informed of this was quite unable to discern the import of the arguments, retiring to his pens and paper with a sense of hardship, and bemoaning his unhappy fortune at the hands of heartless Englishmen.

The types of cases with which a Commissioner is called upon to deal in the course of his daily work do not display a singular variety of origin. In nearly every instance they may be traced to some association with womenfolk or property, and as in these barbarous spheres the former term may be included in a full interpretation of the latter, the basic source of most disputes is narrowed further still. In a station like Melut, which, through its parasitical community, chiefly composed of bottlewasher elements in the employ of local offices, with Arab traders and the domestic entourage of the police, professes a veneer

of elementary culture, the mass of dark humanity to be encountered of a morning in the precincts of the case-room waiting for settlement of their disputes, although devoid of all spectacular appeal for one who has been long familiar with such scenes, offers the newcomer a source of endless interest.

Just cast your eyes in fancy on the motley throng foregathered underneath the shelter of the eaves, regardless of both colouring and sex. Some there will be erect, garbed in the clothing of a proudly borne officialdom; some will be sprawling on the grass, heedless of any covering except the dusky skin which is their natural heritage; others perhaps are squatting, wrapped in the flowing robes of the Mohammedan; and yet a few lolling disconsolately against the dust-swept walls of the adjacent buildings, wherein are heard both plea and counterplea and the swift judgments of the rulers sealed. Let the gaze rest upon those jet-faced figures, negroid of heritage, who stand as sentinels unarmed outside the portals of this humble edifice, clothed in the raiment of the Government's provision—blue shirt surmounting khaki pantaloons, to which a turban of the latter colour lends quite an air of dignity—these, bare of foot, are called "mukhaznis",¹ acting as ushers and as office keepers in the station, and in the rôle of message bearers finding themselves for ever at the beck and call of "mamur" and commissioners throughout their working day. Theirs is a highly prized employment, and is obtained in general by some retired soldier or policeman. In relation to the gang of swarthy knaves and dusky litigants to be imagined in their manifold diversity before you, these men fulfil the rôle of marshalls, preventing discord and maintaining order in the ranks of this impetuous host. Amongst these the unclothed bodies of the low-browed spearmen present

¹ Watchmen.

a striking feature in the foreground of the scene. They with their lithe and sinewy forms, resplendent in the healthful, shining brightness of their skins, pass in the sunlight hours of quiet oblivion that is unfettered by a thought of time, leaving the urgency of their complaints to the convenience of their judge, and from the great Avenger not seeking anything except their master's ultimate consideration. As we pass by each lifts a flabby hand in friendly greeting, and when at length they come before us, a flowing band of cloth that covers the natural beauty of their frames from the official vision will have replaced the panoply of war on which, in the form of shield or spear, they now recline. The squatting Arabs, too, arise on our approach, but if we do not know them personally they will not proffer us a friendly welcome, which they reserve for times of actual meeting between man and man. Yon scraggy native woman whose only garment is a curious hide-made flap, supported by a pair of prominently fashioned hip-bones, that forms the normal arbiter of her connubial modesty, is but a picture, in the years to come, of that full-moulded maiden standing at her side in all the beauty of her unclothed form. What brings this thick-lipped, surly visaged youth before our door? We catch a glimpse of tribal scars upon his cheeks, note his deceitful eyes that fall at once before our glance, and in the escort of police upon his either flank we know that he attends to meet some crime whose nature time will soon reveal. Slouching there clothed in the tattered rags imposed upon him by a spurious civilisation, what thing has he, unhappy wretch, now to account for in his people's lists? Can it be yonder half-veiled, faltering Sudāni maid, lurking in the background amidst a troop of chattering, proudly bosomed matrons, who deems her honour shaken by his abandoned rioting, or is she but the joyful cause thereof,

the while a rival for her favours lies foully smitten by the dagger of the ardent youth? The thick-jowled females, draped in their soulless coverings of blue, that seem a relic from the Bible days of old, shuffling around in quest of local gossip, or nursing squirming babes upon their ample breasts; the aimless, discipline denying youngsters gathered outside the offices with not an end in view save a perusal of the passing throng; the loosely covered two-year-olds grabbing at "mother's skirts" with clutching hands, reckless of flies that find a loathsome feast around their hosts' unshielded eyes—these and a mass of other scenes, staged in contrasting lights and shadows thrown by a brilliant sun upon the well-trod, dust-strewn precincts of this focus of the law, invade our senses in the company of mingled smells and sounds which find in them a normal counterpart.

Afterwards we inspect the native village—a formidable array of "tukls" nestling in lines of martial order under a scattering of well-grown trees, each hut enclosed within a "hosh"¹ some ten yards square, the walls of which are made of grass and rise some six or seven feet above the ground. Herein is gathered all the property belonging to the household head—inside the mud-walled hovel with its thatched and cone-shaped roof the human horde will find a simple shelter; without there stand the sun-dried earthen vessels holding supplies of native corn; while should prosperity be smiling on the home, a half-starved sample of the local beast of toil, the moke, may be observed at certain hours of the day, more generally tethered to a wooden peg within this grass-walled plot.

A brief visit to the Egyptian postmaster, who affects a well-feigned satisfaction at this new intrusion, and we seek once more the quiet retirement of our steamer home.

¹ Courtyard surrounded by a "straw" fence.

In the course of a steady progress down to Renk, a threatening sky, which darkens ominously as we proceed, returns to earth the waters taken from her by the sun's intensity—a sun concealed behind a thickening pall—and as a prelude to long hours of falling rain the fury of the storm is vented on the landscape all around. But ere our journey's end a radiant orb has once again possessed the heavens, and in the cloudless firmament proclaims unrivalled sway.

At the foot of the tree-lined avenue leading from the river causeway of the native village and the station, a tall, lean, pale-faced individual comes down to greet us: upon his ashen countenance—a legacy of past malarial attacks—there beams a smile of cordial welcome due to this fresh reunion with his kind. It is another of the commissioners, and he has been installed in this locality pending return of someone else from leave; and together we betake ourselves to his adopted home.

The approach to Renk by this long closely shaded boulevard is in itself a creditable and picturesque achievement, and has been rendered necessary through the seasonal river floods, which overwhelm the immediate neighbourhood of the banks, and leave the soil unsuitable for permanent abode for some way inland. Thus the site of Renk lies upon rising ground a short mile from the waterside, and in this situation it enjoys complete immunity from all nilotic floods. Second in size to Malakal, though in the volume of its trade surpassing it, due to the settlement of Arabs owning rich flocks within the neighbourhood, and to the carrying on of no mean commerce with the hinterland and Blue Nile provinces, Renk and its neighbouring districts furnish the major portion of the yearly revenue, being on this account included in the province area, though it should come more rightly into its northern neighbour's sphere. In contrast to

the greater portion of the province the Renk vicinity is largely peopled by a purely arab stock, which finds upon its sanded grassy plains an adequate provision for the wandering herds it owns. And these plains, unsubjected to the torrential downfalls prevalent for half the year in regions to their south, do not become impassable, for absence of a purely cotton soil lessens the transport problem even through times of heavy rain.

Renk differs, too, from other stations in the province in its possession of a well-established grain and cattle market and its taxation system is in advance of those in centres further south, having in this respect a common bond with northern towns. The place indeed, may well lay claim to a prosperity unknown elsewhere within the U.N.P., and is a sort of haven for the commissioners to whom a peaceful, settled life possesses an appeal.

The location and appearance of the offices are well in keeping with the progressive nature of the place, reflecting to a notable degree the British representative's prestige. Further afield there lies the native centre, covering a wide and somewhat scattered region, and disposed inconsequentially throughout the neighbourhood are many fields of "dura", which provide the people with their staple food. Outside the offices there stand or lounge the customary motley throngs, but our own business calls for none of these, and we soon settle down to hear the case which brought us to these red brick walls.

About this time there was a mamur here whose bearing and ability were of no common kind, and this man differed from the Egyptians generally in being animated by an exceptional loyalty to British rule. Whether he had conceived this latter rôle hoping to thus promote his interests, it is of course impossible to say, but it was certainly the case that in an attempt

to mould his outlook on the English plan he had at least acquired a superficiality of thought and manner that seemed in general to accord with theirs. Hence in his intercourse with them he was accustomed to display a brisk familiarity, though not devoid, albeit, of a regard for their authority, which was in most marked contrast to the usual attitude adopted by his race. He certainly possessed a pleasing share of virile qualities, which seem entirely lacking as a rule amongst his brethren, and as a natural consequence he was appreciated by the Englishmen with whom he came in contact ; but whether, left to his own devices for a space, he could be readily relied on to maintain the standards of his peers, may be a question leaving certain room for doubt.

Within our colleague's domicile a brave array of trophies of the chase lies strewn before us in an orgy of confusion, and several weapons of destruction are to be seen disposed without regard to order, resting haphazard on the arms of chairs or propped up negligently against the walls as space permits. A fine lion skin has been deposited upon the frame of a decrepit-looking couch and seems to be in splendid harmony with its environment. The floor is littered with a stark review of fleshless skulls of antelope, and is uncarpeted ; these with their horns are occupying most of the space available. Cartridges of all descriptions warrant inclusion in the crude furniture that decorates this section of the house, and sun-dried skins of great variety, cast without care or purpose on the boards, add several shades of colour to this wild display. But most of all the eye is struck by the collection of small birds that have but lately fallen to our colleague's gun and are now seen disposed in case and paper envelope awaiting their eventual export home. For you must know our host is furnishing a friend in England with a selection of the region's

feathered life, in which the scientific interest at Khartoum will have a generous share. Here is, indeed, a workshop of the world.

Upon completion of our duty we depart from Renk, and through the alternating light and shade of sun and storm rejoin headquarters. There is a new face here to greet me in the person of the province engineer who has returned from leave and who in course of time provides me with an interesting study. Born of a humble parentage, he is a man whose ceaseless energy and scheming industry have raised him to a height of tolerable achievement and endowed him with a certain measure of financial strength. It is unfortunate that like many of his kind he cannot appreciate the proper way of dealing with the natives, and since his daily work must bring him into close association with both overseers and labourers, his attitude towards them does not infrequently result in the submission of complaints against his treatment; which state of things is bound to cause some trouble in the white man's camp. In consequence of this the tension so created was sometimes strained, which in itself was most regrettable, for in such lands it is important that the white men should as a whole be in the firmest possible accord. And above all there should never be the slightest hint of discord in that body, cost what it may. But I regret to say the governor and the district staff alike did not refrain from condemnation of the engineer at every opportunity, instead of trying, through co-operation, to inspire him with their own ideals and so perhaps alienate him from his "slave gang" tendencies. I made some effort to befriend this man and pour a little oil upon the troubled waters of this maledictory campaign, but it appeared the iron had entered their souls too deep. High caste bureaucracy looks with no favoured eye on bourgeois failings. However in

the course of my acquaintance with him I learnt a little of his past, his present troubles, and his future hopes, and he was kindness itself to me. His stirring qualities did not escape me for he was a man, and, as a labourer, full worthy of his hire.

In Malakal, these days, the station life flows on through normal channels—routine and tribunal offer no deviation from the general way. There is a little tennis at the Governor's house, but scarce enough material to form a game. The Governor's lady casts the sole ray of light distraction in surroundings which have now begun to pall, and my own thoughts turn fiercely to the outer world in a desire that I be occupied within a more extended sphere. The sultriness immediately preceding the first break of storm is yet surpassed in its intolerable impression by the quite overpowering languor that assails one a few hours after rain has ceased, when a fierce sun results in the suffusion of a humidity that becomes a veritable burden to existence. In the evenings I apply myself to studying arabic, and as I have my lodging in the quarters of the engineer above alluded to, while he is still away, my leisure hours are now well filled. My late colleague has gone north to Renk, where he is to take over that district. There are no other commissioners present in the station, and after "washing bottles" for my superior through a space of weeks I feel a strong desire for independent work. Nevertheless, these early autumn months have been well utilised for my instruction, and there has been no waste of time, the country being always one vast swamp of mud throughout the rainy season. In due course I shall leave the sheltered harbour for the open sea.

One night the "Sagh" arranges local songs and dances for my special joy, and the display is given by a chosen company of maidens, who no doubt like this

opportunity for the portrayal of their charms in the august presence of their foreign lords. The local population has decided to be present in some strength, and as after dinner I arrive to take my station in the centre of an improvised grandstand, where I am surrounded by a host of satellites, a shrill feminine trilling fills the air and in increasing volume permeates the neighbourhood selected for the impending show, reverberating musically in high-pitched tones across the open space and flowing on harmoniously towards the limits of the town, to fall upon the ears of unknown persons who may be happening thereby at the time. The sun has set long since, and in the gloom of moonless night low fires of kindled brushwood, round which are squatting groups of individuals charged with their maintenance, shed many flickering eerie gleams upon the ground not very far from the "reserved" accommodation, forming a rough half-circle on the latter as a base. Outside this ring of fires there is a crowd of indiscriminate variety gathered in sundry clusters that reflect the associations of the persons forming them, and shows the line their predilections take. A bevy of young native girls presided over by a stalwart matron gather beneath the supervisory shadow of the "Sagh", who has himself assumed the showman's mantle. These girls are dressed, it would appear, in gala costume, but apart from a redundancy of anklets and of earrings, their costume does not in the firelight seem to differ very greatly from the daily clothing they are wont to wear. But the dark blue linen drapery in which they are enveloped usually has now been modified, if not by the addition, then at least by the display of a white underskirt, and their shawls have been drawn round their shoulders instead of being allowed to trail down negligently to their feet. Some of them carry a burning brand above their heads, and

these crude torches cast a lurid glare upon the scene.

From some point hid from view comes the monotonous drumming of a tom-tom that proclaims the banishment of care, and cymbals add their haunting notes to form a native melody. A self-appointed female choir squats in the background to assist the scene; across the unimportant space that separates it from the audience the dulcet notes of a soprano harmony are wafted on the air, rising and falling with a well-timed regularity. The droning voices of this dimly noticed gathering of chanting women, upon whom the light of high-held flares is shedding an unsteady light, cast a strange spell upon the picture; and through the little wisps of smoke ascending from the brushwood fires the multitude beyond, uncouth of feature and of habiliment, take on the passing aspect of satanic hordes. For a little while the simple rhythm of the songsters and the unvarying sounds that issue forth upon the night as the result of the remorseless execution of the local band proceed without a break, and peace reigns over the assembled company. But from the selected throng of entertainers there glides forth after a short interval the sinuous figure of a native girl, followed by some half score others who co-operate with her in the evolutions of a weird, fantastic dance. There is little grace or poetry in the gyrations of these native girls; upon the other hand no primitive vulgarity asserts itself, and the proprieties, under the Sagholashi's watchful eye, remain inviolate. Should one more festive than her sisters seek of a sudden to indulge in movements that might well be thought voluptuous, then will that portly personage with a smart tap upon the shoulders of the erring maid apprise her that the canons of good taste are not to be encroached upon, and with a look of mischief in her eye she will desist. For the

repute of the official outlook may not at all be placed in doubt, nor an infringement of its public standards be for one moment entertained!

In the midst of these light scenes of revelry I wander out to cast a glance upon the female choir and take a leisured survey of the throng. The Sudāni maiden is possessed of all those basic and eternal arts wielded by her more cultivated sister in the West, nor does she hesitate to use the unchanging artifices of her sex whenever a hopeful opportunity presents itself. Amongst her favourite finesses is to give frequent, short-lived glimpses of her bosom's charms, which she can readily effect in virtue of the absence of a more formidable show of clothing to conceal them than the flimsy cotton shawl referred to previously. This at propitious moments she unfolds on pretext of its rearrangement, so revealing artlessly the peerless contours of her dusky breasts, and just as artlessly refolding the frail garment before her victim's eyes. This method of appeal is also used in an attempt to influence a magistrate towards her during the hearing of a case—naturally without effect at all upon his ultimate decisions—and even in the wildest parts this pretty artifice has been directed towards me by a scheming Eve. In England, where the economic factor bears so hard upon the press of struggling humans, and certain basic influences in life are said to be forgotten through the press of circumstances that surround them, such show of graces quite uncurbed by any notion of a false and baleful modesty, and redolent no doubt of former Garden episodes, contribute in most laudable degree to an appreciation of the passing days.

Towards the final stages of the entertainment an air of informality begins to be dispensed upon the scene, and a well-built damsel, doubtless emboldened by the presence of spectators in the dance arena,

and by the simple-minded interest evinced by a Commissioner in contemplation of this unaccustomed spectacle, emerges from the body of the dancers and gyrates in his direction at an ever lessening distance. Unalarmed by her advance, he stands his ground feeling that in the dignity of his position he is immune from all the friskings of the maid, suspecting that the shakings of her well-oiled head, which now give rise to an impression chiefly gorgon in its character, are but a local sign of honour and respect. But as a mass of waving hair quivers in an unseemly fashion immediately beneath his upturned chin, some qualms of insecurity begin to undermine the confidence imposing only recently within his breast, and when with an impulsive upward jerk his face receives this greasy tangled skein presented unexpectedly by the now giggling wench, he has a bitter sense of undeserved betrayal that is in no wise lessened by the peals of ribald laughter emanating from the gleeful crowd, to which response can only be by suitable indulgence in a cold and sickly smile. However at this point the "Sagh", who it may be remarked was a promoter of the show and had a place in the arena, came forward swiftly and in paternal fashion cautioned the hussy to desist from these unseemly coquetries. Then the performance terminated and I departed to enlist the sympathy of brush and soap.

From one source or another and at irregular intervals a variety of persons pay passing calls at Malakal. Thus in addition to the two monthly visits of the post-boats sundry wayfarers put in appearances during the course of journeys made on behalf of duty or for pleasure. In the shooting season parties of sportsmen disembark from specially chartered boats en route for the big game areas, to dine with the officials and effect a superficial scrutiny; a steamer full of native troops under their British officers may

make a stopping-place of the locality during their north or south bound passage; or high officialdom may decide upon it as an important link in a long chain of periodical inspections. Both hunting trips and other visits are confined to months when the activities of all the districts are in full swing, and the Commissioners are rarely found at province headquarters at such a time. Hence through the period of my sojourn there I was not ever witness to a visit of this kind. Upon the other hand, I was a witness once of a most extraordinary circus, borne on a steamer from Khartoum, which was displayed for my delight near to the mooring that has been reserved for army purposes beside the river bank adjacent to the camp. This was composed of a battalion destined as reliefs for troops already stationed in the Sobat-Pibor military enclave, which was not yet included in the civil areas, and bordered on the Abyssinian frontier. The sight of this amazing horde was unforgettable, and the seething mass of black humanity gathered upon the transport's decks and lining her attendant barges furnished a spectacle quite inconceivably burlesque. The drollery of the scene lay not so much in the soldiers themselves as in the colouring and nature of their entourage. For all troop movements in these parts invariably entail their transport barrel, lock and stock, that is to say, with wives and young and all the appurtenances of their households, not excluding livestock that they own. And so we gaze upon a boat whose every nook and cranny is indiscriminately filled with all the things of war and with the trappings and the gewgaws of the home. It is an astounding scene. Each family circle has appropriated a restricted area of the deck and seems to be pursuing its domestic life uninfluenced in any great degree by its surroundings. Pots, pans and washing have accumulated in the vicinity of each

parental coterie, and a mass of baggage that is indescribable lies stacked wherever space permits. Not a square foot of room remains unoccupied, and luckless fowls, bound by their feet, are strewn about the ship with princely unconcern for their exhaustion by the sun. Some goats and sheep, tethered to points of vantage on the deck, are filling the air with choruses of intermittent sound peculiar to their breeds, and amidst the babble of human intercourse there light from time to time upon the ears the stifled cluckings of a distressed hen bird or the strident challenge of her mate. And the young! Ye fishes, what a discordant clamour strikes on the babel of the elder tongues! The high-toned ululations of disgruntled bantlings fall upon ears that seek attunement to the hilarious raillery of lawless youngsters flooding the atmosphere with an appalling sound, to which the fitful wails of india-rubber featured infancy adds an exaggerated chord of troubled dissonance. The garrulous bickerings of women add to the vocal ardour of the multitude and imbue this pandemonium with the elements of low Robeian comedy, and as one stands transfixed before the astounding sight a thick-lipped throng of dark-skinned soldiery surveys its chattels with a bovine leer.

The British officers responsible for this strange shipload both appear in course of time, booted and spurred after the usual custom, and present themselves before the Governor; one of them came to me afterwards with a request that adequate provision be ensured for them at Tonga in the matter of supplies of eggs; he told me at a later date the lavishness of local offering at that place had overwhelmed him, and he had suffered much surprise at the response of the authorities to matters of such minor kind.

Another group of frequent visitors to Malakal during my schooling there were the agents of an

English syndicate engaged upon experimental cotton planting in selected districts in the southern provinces, with the avowed aim of cultivating on a larger scale should these first essays ultimately prove successful. They had chartered one of the government steamers and went from place to place just as the spirit moved them, the general manager seeming to make his headquarters on the river and to pass a life of sumptuous ease in travelling leisurely between the various stations under his control. This functionary was of the tub and thump fraternity, addicted as he was to great loquacity and possessing a considerable force of manner, while his enthusiasm for his subject knew no bounds. Many years previously he had been employed as an engineer under the steamers department of the government, and in returning to surroundings which he knew was wont to discourse freely on the prowess he had shown when in these regions during the early days of their first occupation. As for the activities of this same syndicate, they were undoubtedly regarded with distrustful eyes by the authorities at Khartoum, due to the failure of some previous schemes, if not precisely similar, then at least sponsored by the same type of individuals, while like all the British administrations that concern themselves with native Africans they were extremely chary of encouraging commercial interference with the lives and customs of the populations under their control. The result of this was to induce a state of affairs in which the white employees of the syndicate, all working under contract in the rôle of supervisors, were compelled to prosecute their labours without the moral assistance of the provincial staff, by whom they were regarded in a light of some suspicion. The principal supporters of this scheme were certain north of England cotton magnates who spared no pains to win the approval of the governor, as being

the most effective influence on the decisions of the central Government. During the course of his last leave the Governor had paid a visit to the house of one of these financial magnates, where he obtained a striking insight into the outlook of his host. This person proved to be a fine example of the much decried "blood-stained capitalist" and seemed to be a living proof that there are some indeed not undeserving of the term. During a discourse on the possibilities of civil strife, and at the conclusion of a long tirade against the labouring classes, this crude protagonist of the industrial system declared the workers must in any case be worsted, since it was obvious that "our class will use machine guns". As for his views upon the treatment of the proletarian populace of Africa, these, I suggest, will not be difficult to grasp.

With the abatement of the rains and the approach of the main working season (it was by this time near the middle of October), the question of my posting to a district quickly began to claim the attention of the Governor. The Commissioner whom I had met at Renk had come to Malakal and was in course of spending a few days there prior to forming a new establishment at Kodok. During the preceding season he had been administering what might well be claimed the most unsettled section of the province, and the part least subject to the influence of the Government; but from his own description of the country, of its people and its game, I was obsessed with a desire to follow in his steps. It seemed, however, to have earned a sinister repute amongst the officials, white, brown and black, who had either been there or else formed an estimate of its essential nature from the assimilation of some very wild reports. And as no other white had ever visited this zone, whose headquarters had been installed some eighteen months before, under the direction of my

colleague, right in the centre of its territory, I was as able to form a judgment as the rest on the potentialities of life that its administration should involve; and as I now foresaw a splendid opportunity for the pursuit of an untrammelled life amidst environments entirely free from the routine of office, and which afforded outdoor work in unrestricted measure, I resolved to press my claim with every means at my command. And so enlisting to the full the sympathies of my predecessor, who seemed to exercise considerable influence on the Governor, I succeeded finally in realising all my hopes and was appointed to the post at Ayod, the official headquarters of the area concerned.

The territory covered by this district mainly lies between the Sobat and Zeraf, is bounded on the north by the White Nile and on the south by Mongalla province, approximates in size to Lancashire and Yorkshire rolled in one, and in the absence of communication with the interior, except by native foot-path, its administration is a somewhat arduous task. Impressions of the life it held in store for the possessor of its stewardship may be revealed in sundry measure in the following leaves.

CHAPTER V

THE NUER COUNTRY

Foremost among the various schemes that, as an outcome of the previous year's experiences, were now before the Governor's mind, was the creation of a road to lead inland from some point on the river to the district headquarters of the Gaweir; and in the sequel it was finally resolved I should embark upon this venture, about which my superior could give but limited advice, as soon as the countryside was dry enough to allow the use of mules across the plains. The greatest of the difficulties that are entailed by such an enterprise lie in the paucity of labour to be obtained within the zone through which the road must pass, and in the disinclination of the tribal populace inhabiting that sphere to undertake an hour of manual work except to make provision for their more immediate needs, which are exclusively confined, or almost so, to the demands of agriculture and the building of their huts. The Nuers—thus are the tribes inhabiting that district called—are of all peoples in the north or south the most uncivilised and thriftless, and the most difficult to wean from the barbaric indolence that is exclusively the lot of savages eking out a bare existence in corners of the globe long since abandoned (if they had once been occupied) by races of more virile stock. The members of this tribe are not apparently of negroid origin—that is to say, they do not show the facial types associated with the negro race—flat nose, thick lips,

etc.—and though undoubtedly possessed of finer features than the average African, they seem to lack the adaptability of his kind, and shun the intrusion of a civilising force much higher than their own. They are, in fact, the simplest of barbarians : even a crude religion being practically unknown amongst them, though they are influenced to some extent by their ancestral superstitions which are inclined at times to interfere in a preposterous manner with their daily life. These superstitions take the form of a belief in the incorporation of the spirits of their ancestors within the living bodies of some common animal. Thus there will be one man regarding every leopard both with veneration and with fear, another will be so affected by the crocodile and yet another by the golden-crested crane—a bird occurring commonly along the Upper Nile. No individual will touch the skin or carcass, either quick or dead, of any creature he accepts as harbouring his forefathers, and in such matters, as for example, bringing game to camp, it saves much time to make enquiries relative to personal taboos ; for none will lay their fingers on a body they believe now holds the spirit of their great-great-grandfather.

Unlike the Shilluk tribe, who are in process of accustoming themselves to the adoption of a little body covering, the Nuers are an unadorned fraternity, upon whose loins a rag is rarely seen. Some of the “sheikhs” assume the robes presented to them by Commissioners from time to time, but these they will invariably discard when once again within the bosom of their “shens”. Contrarily, there is one somewhat unexpected custom they affect ; a wedded man will never seek the presence of his father-in-law unless his nakedness has been concealed with a loose strip of cloth or rag secured around the loin, and on the periodic visits that he makes to the establishment of

his wife's relative he will invariably present himself in such a guise. This tribe does not affect the ornate hairdressing that is associated with the Shilluks, but they are very often to be seen with heads well covered in a paste of mud and ash allowed to dry upon it with results artistically beneficial to the individual concerned. This style of coiffure is in especial favour with the "younger set", whose bronze-like forms are shown to great advantage following its adoption. A not by any means unusual spectacle is a man with hairs dyed auburn; in that case they will not then be plastered down, and, through their wild dishevelment, will give a touch of singular barbarity to his appearance. Another common practice with the tribe is to conceal themselves from head to foot in wood ash, which they will rub into their skins, and thereby alter its apparent colour from jet black to cinder grey, which in the case of younger men seems to improve upon the already pleasing character of their virility. They do not carry shields; but like the other tribes along the Nile are armed with spears, one of which is purely made for war, or combat, while the other is employed for fishing purposes. Both spears are fixed to wooden shafts some six feet long, and tapering to the attachment point. The fishing spear itself is about eighteen inches long and forms a kind of pike which may be either rounded or else manufactured with serrated edges. The fighting spear may be a foot in length, and some three inches broad across its shorter axis, from which it tapers to a point. These weapons come from Abyssinia, being imported as required by emissaries sent there for the purpose or else exchanged for grain or cattle near the frontier by traders from within its bournes. Archaic firearms, too, are sometimes bought in the same manner, and in their purchase tusks of elephants play an important rôle. The right to hunt these

animals is not accorded any more to natives than under statute it is allowed to others having no proper licence, but nevertheless in practice it becomes well nigh impossible to stem the infringements of the law in this direction, save through the stray fortuities of fate. It is a favourite method of these savages to cover likely areas with traps, that is to say, large excavations in the ground concealed with brush-wood and the like, to which the beasts are driven as occasion offers; or they may dig them in the line of well-known routes frequented by a herd and leave them undisturbed until some creature falls a victim to their guile.

There has been previous reference to the fact that coinage is unknown amongst this tribe, and even the first principles of barter seem confined to purchases of wives by stakes in kine; for apart from cattle, and a few goats here and there, their possessions are of practically no account. The Nuers' herds are of a truth their very life, and it is not an altogether trifling fact that their one form of wealth is so expressed. For disciplinary reasons, as much as with the idea of any augmentation of the province revenues with unimportant sums, each "shen" or sub-division is assessed each year upon its head of cattle, and tributes taken in the form of bullocks from those "shens". It is not feasible to make assessments save by this means, for in the circumstances only collective payments can be entertained. The result of this is that one bullock must be taken from a "shen" that owns, say, thirty head of cattle and consists of twenty males. One luckless individual will thus be called upon to meet the annual tribute of his "shen", and though in years to come this undesirable condition will perhaps be rectified through changing incidences of the yearly tax, it may well happen that affairs may not be placed upon an equitable basis.

In any case the victim of the annual visit, who has been forced, perhaps, into surrendering his sole possession, is likely to invoke a healthy grievance on this score against the Government for years to come. Added to this indictment of a system that is unavoidable there is the natural tendency of tribal sheikhs to take the line of least resistance and refrain from altercations with the strong and well-established members of their "shens", thus further lessening the likelihood of fair adjustment of taxation over a span of years. Could these untutored people be persuaded to increase their crops of native "dura" and to pay a small proportion of it into a common store for tribute settlement each year, these difficulties would quickly disappear, as every family could then be made responsible for its fair quota towards the common levy; but they are far too indolent and lazy as a race to undertake more manual labour than is required to feed them through the rains. Under existing circumstances even temporary famines overwhelm localities after exceptionally dry seasons, and this periodic lack of nourishment no doubt accounts for the comparatively small numbers of the tribes inhabiting these parts of the Sudan.

During the months of drought, when the Nile's subsidence and the formation of large pools in "khors"—referred to later—enable them to spend a portion of their days splashing about in shallow water with their spears, hurling these down at random with the object of sticking whatever may chance to rest upon the bed, fish form a valuable addition to their diet, but at no season do they obtain a regular supply of meat, which if it comes to them at all, will generally do so in the form of one of their own bulls, specially slaughtered for the general benefit. Armed as they are with weapons chiefly intended for their fights, the big game of the country

does not often fall a prey to them, with the exception, also in the months of drought, of the hippopotamus, which at low water is at some pains to screen itself. The elementary state of life by which these peoples are surrounded is only paralleled by the monotony of landscape in which they are mostly found. The area universally known as the Valley of the Nile is in this part represented by what is practically a trackless plain, broken throughout by a multitude of "khors" of varying length, which have a most conspicuous influence on the lives and habits of the scattered tribes.

These "khors" are hardly watercourses in the usually accepted sense, that is, beds along which flow tributary waters into larger streams; rather they are comparatively shallow courses formed in the plain by the main stream's overflow at certain points, and when the Nile is low are quite dried up. At high flood level they are filled with water and in many places quite unfordable. Some of the most prominent ones extend as much as fifty miles or more into the interior, while others only reach back distances of a few hundred yards. Others again form branches of the Nile or backwaters; they leave it at respective points to join it further down-stream several miles, but in each case the water they contain is always still. Hence, it can easily be realised that in effect these "khors" are always draining channels in a plain which at the period of the river's flood would be converted into far-flung areas of swamp, as is indeed the case in the wide region termed the "Sudd." Here through the rains, and for some time after their cessation, vast tracks of country bordering on the Bahr El Jebel for about two hundred miles form one impenetrable swamp, edged with gigantic grasses reaching to a height of ten or fifteen feet, and which extend inland as far as from a steamer's

deck the eye can reach. This vast plain through which the Nile and all its tributaries flow is one prodigious stretch of cotton soil, at best impassable to transport through the rains, and at the worst scarce passable to bare-foot savages. When the dry weather comes the ground begins to crack, and after they have been uninterruptedly subjected for a month or so to the sun's daily heat these cracks assume immense proportions—so much so that the use of mules is not entirely free from lively risk. The depth to which these fissures reach is problematical, and it is not exaggerating facts to say that a long length of stick may be dropped safely into most of them without the slightest hope of its recovery. The long grass covering the countryside reaches above a tall man's head, but as the drought proceeds it is burnt up by sun and fire, which in the latter case is due to native hands. Large areas of the country bear nothing else except this grass; elsewhere there may be scattered "heglig" trees, and lightly-wooded forests of this species will abound. But the most common features of their kind in this connection are the wide tracts of medium bush chiefly composed of "talc" trees, which are disposed about the plain in great profusion. Another localised variety of tree is the "kharub". This is found inland in the neighbourhood of "khors", and through its long bean-pods furnishes the native woman with the essential oil that she employs in very questionable accentuation of her natural charms. "Talc" and "heglig" are both spiked with thorns; the latter may be classed as timber, since the trees grow to a height of forty feet or more; the former, averaging about twelve feet from the ground, is strictly speaking "bush". The first kind bears no fruit, but it exudes a gum which does not seem to have a local use. The second bears a fruit shaped like an acorn. It is

bitter to the taste when ripe, is of a deep yellow colour, and forms a useful ration for the natives in emergency.

There is not usually a great predominance of undergrowth in bush or forest areas—in fact they are singularly free from it—but where encountered it is always a most formidable obstacle, being invariably composed of a tenacious thornbush, forming a thicket of impenetrable density that it is a far from simple matter to destroy.

Dispersed in small groups over such a country live the Nuers. These groups compose the “shens” or sub-divisions of the various tribal families, rarely exceeding a few dozen individuals; they have established villages in zones arranged amongst themselves, pursuing lives of indolence and inactivity except where forced by the exigencies of nature towards their own self-preservation. These villages are hardly more than small agglomerations of grass-built huts, around which have been cleared small plots of ground sown with the native corn (“dura”). The size of these necessitates the minimum of agricultural labour on their owners’ parts, and also minimises any prospects of their gaining proper nourishment throughout the year.

It must be said that in the building of their huts, or “tukls”, these simple people show constructive powers not easily associated with their state of living, for though the sole materials which they have at hand are brushwood, grass, and earth, they nevertheless succeed in making habitations that afford them shelter from the heavy rains, and cool retreats through the most trying periods of the day. A well-made “tukl” shows a considerable degree of craftsmanship, which is especially noticeable in the structure of the roof. In the original framework of the huts, a circular ring of sticks is

laid upon a series of bough-supports cut to a length of about three feet and planted in the ground. From the top of the skeleton thus formed a trellis-work of sticks and poles, all roughly cut from "talc" trees, rises at an angle with the horizontal of approximately forty-five degrees, and, tapering to a point some twelve feet from the floor, serves as a network for the cone-shaped roof, having its interstices filled in with lengths of "dura" stalks. The floor diameter is naturally dependent on the needs of individual families, but a fair average measurement is about twelve feet. The arrangement of the roof is quite devoid of any singular conception, but the workmanship entailed is striking and gives proof of a dexterity not to be expected from such barbarous artisans, and the final thatching shows ingenuity of no mean order. The finished roof is maintained centrally by a hand-hewn pole with its base entrenched a short depth in the ground, and mud walls are erected round the lower portion of the structure to the level of the ring above referred to, the thickness of these walls being perhaps as much as nine or ten inches, with an entrance large enough to allow of one man crawling through it at a time. A kind of mat made out of "dura" stalks usually covers up the entrance hole at night.

Such are the "permanent" habitations of these folk, who, when they find it necessary to build anew, commence their operations (which are entirely communal) during the final stages of the months of drought, when they complete the network, leaving the building of the side walls till the rains enable them to bring both mud and water with facility to the perfection of their tasks.

In addition to the homes which form their normal domicile for the best portion of the year, each "shen" associates itself with a locality to which

it travels yearly when at the onset of the drought it is compelled to seek new pastures, since its water is no more. These places will be situated either by the riverside, or on the larger "khors," or yet again in close proximity to inland ponds (usually "fulas" formed in the dried-up beds of "khors") that have sufficient volume to remain perennial sources of supply. There are no "tukls" in the neighbourhood of these, but every household builds a small grass shanty for itself as a protection from the sun, and a communal zareba also is constructed for the safety of the cattle of the "shen." At nightfall in the villages, cattle are herded into specially large "tukls," made like those occupied by humans, though of a greatly increased size.

The supply of water in the villages is obtained from excavations made by the native dwellers at convenient spots in the vicinity, the same holes being used year in year out. In point of shape and size these holes are not unlike the craters formed by the explosion of high explosive shells, measuring in many cases ten or fifteen feet across the top, and extending to a depth of six or seven feet below ground level; and they form efficient reservoirs for gathering water through the rains, at the decline of which they are roofed in with mats of vegetation having support on poles embedded in the mud, which artifice impedes evaporation. Under such circumstances water may be preserved until well on until the middle of the drought, and it is quite surprising how untainted and how sweet the contents of these pools remain, the state of stagnancy imposed upon them seeming to have but little effect upon their purity even when they approach the point of ultimate exhaustion.

With the various racial sections of the Nuers

¹ Pools.

constituting independent tribes, it is unnecessary to concern ourselves, beyond the fact of their existence in certain scattered areas as distinctive branches of a common stock. These sections oft engage in internecine strife, and though speaking the same tongue have little else in common save the same customs and a like mode of life. The branch to which attention will be here confined is known as the Gaweir, for it was in amongst these people that my duties lay.

The tribal sub-divisions of the Nuer folk are based on certain persons whose descendants all continue by consent to wield the power and authority of their forbears, although owing to the undisciplined condition of these wild communities only a few of their accredited leaders are so in actual fact. The patriarchal system is responsible for the formation and continuance of these "shens," blood relatives remaining in the fold of origin. Although from time to time associating under common leadership—the term is here incapable of any but most limited acceptance—the members of the tribe are not at heart disposed towards the institution of a central power of their own, there being practically no sign of such a tendency, and scarcely an inducement to that end now that the white man shows himself resolved to stop the spread of strife under whatever pretext it arise. The difficulties facing a successful dispensation in judicial fields, and meet co-ordination of the tribal interests, are not diminished by the lack of an effective mouth-piece for the dissemination of the white man's ordinance, the force of which must be maintained under his own direction, with no reliance placed on the enforcement of his judgments by the local powers. Those judgments, being confined well nigh exclusively to the ownership of cattle, offer but little scope for the display of foresight or for the

exercise of wisdom, and have to be delivered usually upon the unassisted evidence of single parties—defendants generally absconding with their just or unjust gain before the submission of the charge against them. Hence the case—mainly as a last resource. Plaintiff has almost certainly come forward to enlist the sympathy of the commissioner and the co-operation of his armed police. To that theme there will be some further references, but with this general survey of the district and its folk the primitiveness of them both having by now been clearly borne in on the reader's mind, let him hark back with me to those first days of my instalment as commissioner within that zone, when on the threshold of its river-bounded bournes I stood apprentice to the experiences of future time and coming circumstance.

CHAPTER VI

IN THE LONG GRASS

Leaving Malakal with a small detachment of police, roughly a dozen men all told, together with the domestic staff, including cook and boy and bottle-washing factotum; not to mention all my commissariat for a full six months, packed up in donkey-boxes, a generous load of cotton goods and spears, and other articles and implements from the province store of such a kind as might be likely to appeal to Nuers, and which would serve as payment for their labour on the intended road; and supplementing these with a few coloured robes for the more prominent among the "sheikhs", I voyaged up-stream past the Sobat's mouth to a police post situated near the entrance to the Khor Atar taking its name from this last feature. Khor Atar is to be numbered with the largest of the river's overflows and there is always water for a few miles inland from its mouth. In full flood the main stream's overflow is carried back for certainly a space of fifty miles, but no one yet has had sufficient time to trace it to the point where it is lost in swamps or joins some other channel having connection with the Nile. During the rains it may be navigated by the province steamers for a few miles from its mouth although this point at present has not much value to the Government from an administrative point of view. The post itself, distant about a half mile from the "khor", consists of a small settlement on the right bank of

the Nile, where a village of some dozen "tukls" has been built to house the small police squad always located there. There is a non-commissioned officer in charge, and in those days he was the senior member of the province force, an old ex-soldier known by his rank of "Sol-Tâyin", abbreviated generally to "Sol". This old boy might with some justice be acclaimed a character of local note, representing as he did a very excellent and faithful type of black dependant—the kind which burdens of increasing years imbue with picturesque and fabled glamour, bringing to it an atmosphere of undisputed permanence in full accordance with the accepted principles surrounding old traditions.

Apart from these policemen and their families, the only other individual found in the settlement is an arab trader, who, besides furnishing the inhabitants with those few articles that in the course of contact with the outer waves of Western life they have, in common with their kind, come to regard as necessaries, is engaged in intermittent though no doubt highly profitable trade with many tribal elements inhabiting the neighbouring countryside. Besides the "tukls", amongst which the more pretentious dwelling of the "Sol," with its small vegetable garden, offers a marked though vain appeal to the class consciousness of his subordinates, there is a modest rest-house set aside for white authority and built in much the self-same style as the adjoining huts, though with perhaps a greater show of finished workmanship bestowed upon it. The area covered by the post is small, it is a hundred yards in length and breadth at a rough estimate, and a short ramp of earth leads down into the river from the central mustering ground. A solitary "heglig" tree provides the only shade in the immediate neighbourhood although at no great distance there are others of its kind.

(A)



(B)



(C)



(B) BANKSCAPE—UPPER NILE.
(C) TONGA LANDING STAGE.

On account of the dilution of the surrounding cotton soil with sand, the grass in the locality is not of such luxuriant growth as is the case elsewhere. Along a pathway leading from the post towards a small community that lives a few miles inland on the "khor", short tufted grasses grow that do not much impede a walking man. The people forming this community are Dinkas, a tribe disposed irregularly along the upper Nile, but not established hereabouts in any numbers. Possessed in common with the Nuers of the same attribute of laziness, and like them clad only in Dame Nature's covering, they call for little comment, since their customs and their mode of life do not appear to differ greatly from their savage cousins', save that through being as a whole in closer touch with the administration they have become more tractable.

Half a mile up-stream right across the "khor" there are two huts that house a pair of operators on the telephone running between the post and Taufikia. On such occasions as at varying intervals I wished to use this telephone, which joins a line to Malakal from Taufikia, I was compelled to leave the post in a canoe, a journey that involved a ten or fifteen minutes' paddle by a pair of natives from amongst the ever-changing humans visiting the place as need or spirit moved.

The rains had barely given place to the dry weather when I arrived at Khor Atar, and as the ground in places was still suffering from the effects of the past summer, and the long grass had only just commenced to lose its verdant freshness, I decided to allow myself a short respite before embarking seriously upon the coming task. In the meantime I was able to dispose of several cases that had been awaiting the arrival of a D.C. and were brought forward from all sides as soon as my presence had

been noised abroad. It was beneath the shadow of the lone "heglig" tree that my acquaintance with the laws of these wild people was first made, and with the help of the police interpreter (usually the old "Sol") I learnt to mete out justice of a summary and simple kind, for with such must cases be surrounded if the native law is to be properly upheld.

In the meantime, bands of Dinkas from the nearby villages were working on the road, under the supervision of the "Sol", upon a compass line which I had given them. This task involved them in the clearing of a fairway from the post, across a region dotted here and there with "tukls" lying outside the zone of native habitation, towards the open plain which lay beyond. In this they were assisted by the police and after some few days had passed, and the weather seemed set fair, we settled down to face the indeterminate labours which confronted us. Indeterminate they must be because our aim was to work through to Ayod as soon as possible, and we could not foresee when that might be accomplished: indeterminate, also, since it was by no means certain that along the suggested route we should attain our destination, owing to lack of water on the way. Such indeed would surely prove the case if we were long delayed by natural obstacles, for with the termination of the rains each day that passed witnessed a diminution of the water in the pools, or "fulas", reasonably to be encountered in the course of our advance. Accordingly there was no time to lose, and with a full appreciation of the whims of chance we commenced our trek across the plain.

As a result of the reconnaissance undertaken on the previous day beyond the existing limit of the road, I had arrived with a small party at the edge

of talc bush, which seemed to stretch away beyond the horizon as you observed it from the upper branches of a tree set near its fringe. Just before reaching this we had passed through boggy ground, and as it proved to indicate a very shallow "khor", now practically dried up, it seemed that fate intended us to use the neighbourhood, some ten miles distant from our base, as a first camping ground along the route. The road had only then been cleared from Khor Atar for some five miles; this left it at the limits of the long grass which then came into view as an enormous, boundless sea, leaving an equal distance to be traversed ere we made our camp. On mule back, as I rode along, the tall luxuriant grass restricted vision to a few yards' distance from one's nose, and so the tree-tops in the "talc" bush, whither we now were travelling, did not come into view before we had almost reached the borders of the latter. Struggling indeed we were—and that is no exaggeration—and should there be a doubter reading this then let him make his way amongst the grasses of those southern plains for even just a few short miles. So with his face perpetually brushed by swinging blades, some six or seven feet in height, his harassed animal indulging every fifty yards or so in sudden halts in order to recuperate its energies for further forward moves, while in his wake a body of perspiring natives urges the other laden beasts ahead with curious calls, he will no longer seek to doubt how great may be the impediment of reed-like stems to one who makes to traverse them beneath the scorching sun.

Having at length attained the objective of our march we then pitched camp within the forest's edge, and the remainder of the day was occupied in each man fixing his effects to best advantage. The police set up a few grass shelters for themselves,

and with the aid of sticks and waterproofs had soon made satisfactory bivouacs. For me they built a comfortably sized shelter, and my canvas bed was set upon the ground, beneath a tree from which the essential mosquito-net hung down. A clean supply of water proved to be available a short way off, and as the neighbourhood was well supplied with wood and sticks the camping ground seemed very favourable.

There is a forceful and peculiar call about the bush especially for one who makes his first acquaintance with it. Whether it be the freedom from convention's trammels, or the strong sense of contact with the wild estate of nature, or the invigorating action of the sun upon a body garbed in the minimum of clothes it is of small account, but certainly the feeling of a splendid liberty struck me most forcibly as I felt safe at last from the restrictions that seemed out of place with tropical environment at Malakal, but which exigencies of state and the necessities of outward show rightly demanded should be zealously observed. Here, praise kind Heaven, dressed in short knickers and a khaki shirt with open neck, a dozen Sudanese policemen in the offing and no white man within a hundred miles of me; with darkling henchmen close at hand to do my simplest bidding, and with all members of my party seeking the execution of their leader's merest whim; a stalwart "onbashi"¹ to muster everyone within his charge as needs demand; here, in the habitat of countless game—lion, leopard, and antelope, buffalo, elephant and giraffe (for the surprise of which an eager spirit bides its time, while careful hands preserve the gunsmith's masterpieces)—here, kindest Providence, are mind and body met together in a fierce content.

Intriguing, too, beneath the nostrils, rises the

¹ Corporal.



FIRST CAMP OUT OF KHOR ATAR POST.

tang of animals, but lately in this place. Nearby some antelope have made their lair for a night, and with a new day have roamed on again, under the insistent promptings of the wild, leaving behind them no mean traces of their stay.

As darkness falls, a great hush comes upon the forest and the air is still. A large wood fire casts a bright glare upon the scene and lights and shadows flicker across the red-barked trunks and branches of the surrounding trees. Under the shadow of the bush the grass does not attain the length it reaches in the open, and the small space devoted to the camping ground has been entirely cleared of it. The rifles of the police stand piled beside their bivouacs, and a few men are seated by the cheerful blaze tending it as occasion needs, while others recline in careless ease upon the ground discoursing in low tones that often break into the childish laughter of the barbarous tribes from which they spring. Passed has the heat of day long since and a fresh coolness gradually steals upon the plain, while as my minions busy themselves in preparation of the evening meal a healthful hunger finds in their master a responsive chord. But as the evening settles into night (this happens quickly near the equator, twilight being short) some independent warriors from the winged hosts come down like wolves upon the fold, so finishing a hasty meal I don my night attire speedily, seeking the shelter of the net through which they cannot pass.

It finally proved necessary to make a ten-day sojourn in this spot, as all the work involved in felling trees and in removing undergrowth prevented speedy progress being made. After a short time spent in clearing what remained untouched of that first section of the road between us and the post at Khor Atar, there followed days of slow but steady progress

through the forest, cutting down trees, removing stumps, and hacking away tenacious, thorny and impenetrable thickets such as would periodically block the workers on the road. By this time all the Dinkas had returned to their own homes, and only twelve police remained, but in effect this number was as great as could conveniently be utilised in the dense medium through which progress lay, and in the pioneering stages at this time there was no need for further hands.

It was during these early days that my first bout of fever came upon me. I was attacked by a queer feeling that I attributed to lassitude for which the midday sun might well have been responsible, and I lay down beneath the shelter of a bush beside the road in order to dispel the sense of weariness I was experiencing. I walked on later back to camp and found myself in splendid fettle on the morrow. Although these light attacks occurred again at intervals it was some time before I realised that I had been a victim to malaria.

After this reference to a common malady, let me make mention of a trial that brought affliction to me in the bush, provoking pain not easily to be effaced, despite the minor import that the uninitiated may ascribe to it. I speak of blistered skin. A note of warning had been sounded for me in the first place on the southward journey from Khartoum, when as a result of bareing both my forearms to the sun over a space of days I suffered inconvenience from the resulting burns—the force of which affliction caused me great surprise. When I set out from Khor Atar in shorts, which left my knees without protection from the sun, it was not very long before this indiscretion had come home to me. After a few days I began to suffer unbelievable distress, the pain of inflammation reaching such a pitch that I had

actually great difficulty in walking and experienced frequent interference with my sleep from this same cause. But though I was compelled to cover the affected skin with a protective liniment the damage could not be so simply rectified, and on my knees there soon appeared a rawness that developed a condition in which pus flowed freely; and for some days I was the victim of considerable pain. After this experience, when the skin had healed under the beneficial application of emollients, I took care to see that the protective pigmentation of my knees should be evolved by their restricted bareing to the sun each day.

Occasional journeys to and fro between the camp and Khor Atar were marked by no outstanding incidents, although upon a certain day three parties underwent the shock of unforeseen events. Of these it would be somewhat difficult to indicate the most affected, for in the suddenness of unexpected meeting surprise is chiefly found to lie. One of my police, either delayed upon the route and so compelled to follow on in rear of the main body by himself, or else returning for some reason on his tracks—the precise situation has escaped me—was approaching a small “fula” at the side of the roadway when he noticed a lion in the act of drinking at its edge. The mule which he was leading became simultaneously aware of the beast, and in a fit of terror jerked itself free from its guardian and made off into the long grass. At the same time the lion, surprised at his quiet drink, bounded off in an apparently equal fright, to judge from his precipitate flight, becoming lost to sight in a very few seconds. The wretched mule was eventually collected intact and the two continued their uneven progress towards the camp.

Lions frequenting the Sudan are not characterised

by any marked boldness of disposition—general cowardice when in the presence of man has been and usually still is imputed to them as a leading trait—and for this reason no encouragement is offered the police in the matter of expending ammunition to destroy them, since unless wounded the animals are most unlikely to molest them. The natives, on the other hand, never lose opportunities of hurling spears at everything they see, and the chances may be accounted fairly even in any attack so launched upon the wilder beasts. In this connection, the Commissioner who had first welcomed me in his capacity as Deputy-Governor had been a witness some time back of certain unrehearsed effects that had apparently caused him no small worry, and from the story he recited he would seem to have had firm ground for such. He was riding along on mule-back at the head of a small "hamla", passing through long grass as yet unaffected by the oncoming drought, when suddenly a lion stood looking at him for an instant right athwart the path. He was not carrying a rifle, and immediately behind him was an armed Nuer, who, with the accustomed impetuosity of his race, lost very little time in hurling his spear at the body of the now retreating beast, which, taken originally by surprise, had quickly recovered itself and sprung off into the grass. By the grace of Providence, so mused my colleague, the missile fell wide of its mark, and the animal escaped untouched, leaving behind it a number of police rifles by this time fully loaded and prepared for all emergencies. Had the spear struck home at some point of the beast's anatomy other than its heart there is little doubt that the luckless D.C. would have been the victim of an infuriated onslaught for which he was entirely unprepared. Corollary-wise there follows the inevitable law for those

travelling through the long grass—He travels the safest who carries his gun.

Being comparatively near to human habitation the wilder kinds of game did not frequent the neighbourhood in which we now were occupied, but in the course of days we caught some fleeting glimpses of Tiang, Gazelle and Water Buck, though all these beasts quickly disappeared from sight as soon as they became aware of us. On one occasion only did wild animals disturb the peace of night, and I do not forget the eerie fascination that the distant calls of two hyaenas had for me when for the first time they descended on my ears—the curious, moaning howl affected by their tribe that seems without a parallel on earth. In the long hours of darkness it strikes upon the hearer as an unearthly chord, the devilish product of some fiendish creature that combines a howling and a snarling with a resonant and ghostly whine. A mangy scavenger this creature is: his bite is just as fearful as his howl, because his jaws are so immensely strong; but his own fear is stronger still.

Towards the far side of the talc forest surrounding us there were some heglig trees at no great distance from our path, and a scout was sent up one of these to take a general survey of the country straight ahead, for up till then it had been quite impossible for us to see beyond the maze of bush confronting us on every side. This volunteer, having effected an ascent of the selected tree, provided us with tidings of which we sorely stood in need, for he reported that an open plain of grass was near at hand. By way of anecdote, as well, he could recall a single elephant as moving slowly off away from us at no great distance, and though this was inspiring to me I had no wish just now to follow any deviation from the path of my immediate aim. So having cut

our way through the forest we were confronted by another sea of grass, studded this time with widely scattered heglig trees, and, though there were not many visible just here because the grass was very tall, the daily progress of the road brought others to our view at varying intervals.

We were now confronted with a growth of weed-like grass, surpassing any previously encountered, and I do not hesitate to add that never did I meet afterwards with such resistance as when pushing on across the next five miles or so in that locality. For in this region it was not a case of ploughing furrows through the shroud of green that overspread the plain, but rather one of cleaving passage through a tangled mass of vegetation offering so strong a bar to movement that it was often necessary to free oneself from the herbaceous tentacles surrounding one through fierce resort to knife and hatchet. This situation had its source in the long strands of creeper, much resembling the convolvulus, which in selecting for its own support a quantity of grassy stems in its vicinity formed in effect a veritable net of living fibre. And so at frequent intervals either a foot, or stirrup, or some other thing would be caught up amongst these natural ropes, resulting in a sudden strain that would bring man and beast to rest until the obstacle had been removed. At other times a mule would be impeded in its movement or completely stopped through the entangling of its feet, and the donkey-boxes proved a fruitful source of hindrance on the occasion of our journey to the following camp, becoming separated from the animals continually under the impetus of sudden, unexpected jerks.

With the completion of a passage through this grass for such a distance as allowed a daily coming to and fro from the first camp without the undue

imposition of fatigue upon the workers, I set out once more with two policemen to select a suitable location for the second bivouac. Another patch of bush had previously been spotted in the distance, and as it did not seem to terminate on the horizon we gauged it as of greater size than that which was behind us. A two or three hour journey through the grassy plain above described and we were on the borders of this forest, the outer fringe of which was decked with an increasing family of heglig, these trees spreading from the open plain into the forest, and being met with here and there throughout its length. We were perhaps a quarter of a mile away from this new wooded limit when we came suddenly upon a "fula" still containing a small quantity of water. Covered in places with white water lilies, both its sides and bottom bore the imprints of a herd of elephants, which it was obvious had but lately passed this way, slaking their thirst and gambolling in the pool. As we approached the forest edge, two Roan antelope, roused from their lair as they lay resting in the protective shade of a large bush that shielded them completely from the vigour of the midday sun, wheeled round and hurtled away into the screen of grass surrounding them. Once within the shelter of the bush, which was of such consistency as did not greatly interfere with progress, it was a short time only ere we experienced the good fortune to alight upon another "fula", which being in the shadow of a ring of trees still held a fair supply of water. Therefore, having invoked each other's testimony upon the spacious providence of Allah, we retraced our steps amidst the grassy labyrinth that separated us from the existing limit of the road. Needless to say, depending as we did upon a few lone trees disposed across the plain, the individual forms of which, each vaguely memorised that morning,

furnished at intervals the only landmarks in an apparently boundless sea, we struggled on beyond the point the road had reached, striking the track some distance from the end, though we had doubtless travelled close beside it for some time.

The afternoon of the following day found us ensconced on our new camping ground, thankful at having gained the shelter of the forest after some weary hours spent upon the plain. In this fresh spot the toil of several days now claimed our residence, and after clearing the road as far as this new camp there came a task resembling that which had been previously involved in our advance through the first patch of virgin bush. Work now was plagued through the great frequency of thorny thickets mentioned formerly, which hindered progress through the necessity of exercising care when dealing with the long, spiked ramifications of their twig-like stems. We had experienced an odd shower or two whilst based upon the initial bivouac, but rain had by this time ceased to interfere in any way, and the magnificent winter season settled upon us in its short-lived glory. The dryness of the atmosphere proved most exhilarating, except throughout the hottest hours of the day, but even then, busying myself on foot under the partial shade of talc, the leaves of which bear some resemblance to the hawthorn, I did not suffer great oppression from the heat. It was strange to wake up just before sunrise and to feel the cold air striking bitter on one's face, to see the hoar-frost on the ground and, on a few occasions, how the "fula" had been lightly frozen over at its edges in the night. Perishing cold indeed confronted us throughout our sojourn in this camp each morning that we rose to greet the day, and being merely clad for tropical heat the rigour of these early temperatures smote hard upon our vitals at

this early hour. With the rising of the sun's red orb, however, the air warmed quickly, and until half-past ten the weather might have been accounted perfect. The short grass in the forest was by this time largely desiccated, and as the ground was dry and firm (it had commenced to crack) there was an almost total absence of mosquitos.

At the conclusion of a week's work in this locality, progressing forward at the rate of perhaps a thousand yards each day, there came upon us to our great relief a little band of Dinkas who, it appeared, had been attracted to the spot by sounds of tree-felling. It was obvious they were mightily surprised at this encounter, for no white man had yet passed this way before, there being neither native paths nor any special reason for a visit. They were amazed at the sight of the long avenue through the forest, at the end of which a small round patch of sky marking the point of contact between bush and grass, seemed like a lone star shining in a firmament of green. But for us their presence should imply a village close at hand and with it adequate supplies of water, both of which suppositions soon proved true in fact. Upon the following day the extension of the road took us past signs of habitation, reaching ere long a clearing in the forest, where there were native "tukls" and some isolated tracts of corn. In this locality we came upon a native path, cleared later to create a wider fairway, and after passing through another unimportant patch of bush we reached the limit of the forest to look out upon a further vast expanse of grass from which stray heglig trees would rise at distant intervals. Nearby were three or four more "tukls", and two artificial "fulas" had been excavated also close at hand. To this centre we next moved our camp, all greatly pleased to have communion with its crude

inhabitants, and eager, too, to glean some information on the way before us; I anxious also to discover something more about these Dinka people. Here too I hoped to gain recruits for work upon the road: in this I was not disappointed, for through the efforts of my own interpreter some dozen persons were procured—who probably were all the adult males belonging to the “shen”.

In return for the labour of these friendly “starkos”, spears, beads and other articles were handed out to them, and to their women-folk fine linen in great quantity. The clamorous competition of these nude barbarians for the possession of gaudy covering for their wives instilled a lively interest into the task of distribution, and the self-conscious vanity of women thus adorned graced the proceedings with a very human note, providing simultaneously a feast of elementary pantomime not to be separated from the memory of those days. The picture of a flap-apparelled primitive swathing her darkling body in a coloured sheet of inexpensive cotton cloth from Manchester, smirking the while in joy and pride of her embellishment, will always rise before me as my thoughts turn once again to that far corner of a distant plain, nor will they ever turn to other spheres ere I have praised Heaven for the Eternal Feminine.

Several days of labouring over a shadeless plain, with here and there a heglig tree or two to serve as landmarks, and on our right a distant line of trees, which subsequently proved to lie along the bed of Khor Atar; days when there was nothing but an infernal sea of grass to share with us a cloudless sky above; never a sound, nor ever a sight, save the unending miles of green; sun and cracked cotton soil, perspiration, compass bearings and an extended line of stooping black men, each one responsible for

some three hundred yards of track—on such my thoughts and senses were entirely concentrated for the space of fourteen days. Fortune again favoured us in the early stages—the route passed close to yet another “fula”—and we made yet another bivouac by its side; though without shade save that afforded by a hand-made thatch the place provided small inducement for a continued stay. Onward again another “fula,” and another camp, and further sweltering days upon the open plain. Not far from here a band of talc bush could be seen above the grass; of its extent we could gauge little, and cared less, for the urgent call was towards the Khor Atar which was believed to take an eastward bend and cut across the direction of our road. The map by which I worked outlined the “khor” only as far as the start of its reputed bend; after that point no course was shewn, as none had mapped it, and no one certainly had passed this way before. Some twenty-five miles beyond the Dinka village a line of low trees showed on the horizon, and as we pushed ahead they seemed to cross our front at an acute angle to our line of road. This later proved to be the khor-bed, though at the time this fact had not come home to me. There was a gradual concentration of the trees as we progressed, and from the sparsely studded plain through which we had been moving we came almost imperceptibly into a belt of ever-thickening density. We crossed an area of “kharub” trees. The grass became a great deal less obstructive to our movements, and the soil began to include some particles of sand. At this point I went forward with another, and we soon found ourselves in bush which differed vaguely from the bush I had encountered previously owing no doubt to the local introduction of “kharubs”, and the good going underfoot, for sandy ground was

now ubiquitous. We rested in the shade awhile, and then I clambered on to the lowest branch of a "kharub" near which we had ensconced ourselves, and at a distance of some thirty yards or so there lay before my gaze the still, clear waters of the Khor Atar, shining most brilliantly beneath the midday sun, its edges lined with tall reeds rising picturesquely from its muddy bed, and great white water lilies spaced on its surface in a rich profusion.

So the next day we crossed the Khor, fording through water lying knee-deep on a weed-strewn bed that loaded mules could not negotiate. The crossing therefore occupied some time from start to finish, as the stores and baggage had to be carried to the other side upon the backs of men, and there were fifty yards of water to be crossed before the opposing bank was gained.

We had barely pitched our camp on the far side when a Dinka came upon the scene, and though he did not long remain with us he gladdened us by information that there was a village situated just a few miles down the khor towards its mouth, for this assisted me in checking my position.

There was a Nuer sheikh who had accompanied us from Malakal, had worked with the police along the road and, prior to crossing over, appeared to have some recognition of the countryside, pointing emphatically in the proposed direction of our goal, which he assured us lay to the left of where my compass bearings indicated. However, I preferred to trust to these, knowing that we must shortly cut across a native path lying approximately at right angles to our own, and so I did not modify our line of march. Little was I aware how great a confidence the natives warranted in matters of direction, even in places practically devoid of land-marks, and as was proved by subsequent events this faithful sheikh, one Deng,

had been entirely right. I call him faithful since for some reason of his own he had attached himself to us, as much, I now suspect, from curiosity as from more advantageous motives, and he was undertaking his full share of every labour borne by the police, with no more recompense than a daily "dura" ration. I had provided him with robe and girdle, and thus clothed he had shared with us the fortunes of the plains. I recall him now as one of the local institutions of those days—he subsequently followed me on nearly all my journeys—and if a white man can make friends with a pure savage, then Deng was mine. It might be said of him that he was both a sportsman and a humorist—can there, I ask, be greater praise?

A few more days of wallowing through tall grass studded at intervals with open bush which did not call for use of axe or hatchet brought us quite suddenly upon the well-worn path that led from Khandak to the "Duk", and the next day, striking our camp beside the Khor, we started out to gain the long sought haven of that promised land in one day's single march.

Close by the junction of our track with this most welcome fairway there was a small zareba for the use of native herds—a cleared space with a fifty yard perimeter round which a wall of bush and thorns rose to a height of ten or eleven feet, forming a screen impenetrable to man or beast. Such a retreat, set on the much frequented way between localities removed from each other by no mean interval, served as a resting place by night for individuals or larger bands impelled by circumstance to undertake the journey either way. Here was their cattle safe from the marauders of the plain, for lion and leopard could not hope to pierce the protective shield of spikes and thorns that held them from their prey.

Four hours of steady travel hither from the camp, followed after some minutes by a protracted trek along the native path, brought us in sight of quite a new horizon, out of which through shimmering haze there gradually emerged the far-off tops of stately palm trees, blending afar off in the distance with the grassy bournes ahead, and bringing welcome change upon the scene surrounding us.

As we pressed onward happily a different countryside unfolded gradually before our eyes, a countryside in which monotony of bush and open plain transformed itself by small degrees into a scene of high-palmed beauty, and the long rank grass of early morning gave place unnoticeably to such yielding frailty of tender stalks as decked the ground this afternoon, while with each forward step the sun-cracked cotton soil mingled indubitably with an increasing prevalence of sand. Here and there single palm-trees, seeming like outposts to the main clusters on beyond, stood out in noted contrast to the scattered bush through which we passed, and other vegetation of a palm-like character appeared, with many new varieties of shrub and plant on either hand. So in due time we came once more to habitation, for at the edge of this new country, living in scattered "tukls" hidden from view by clumps of palms and trees, a Nuer "shen" was dwelling at the gates of quite a paradise upon the local borders of this drear and soulless plain.

CHAPTER VII

AYOD AND THE DUK RIDGE

The Duk Ridge is a feature of these parts to which a singularly inappropriate term has been applied. The designation "ridge" appears to have arisen from the conceptions of a mind concerned less with the embodiment of actual facts than with the semblance of deception. "Duk" is a local word implying "knoll" or "hillock," and is applied in general to the sandy mounds that cover the area we are now considering. The natural feature known as the "Ridge" consists of a length of sandy soil set in the middle of these vast plains, and extends in an almost north and south direction for the space of roughly a hundred miles. Its breadth varies from a few hundred yards to three or four miles, an average transverse measurement being about two miles. Apart from a series of independent sandy knolls, ranging up to a maximum height of perhaps fifteen feet, it is doubtful whether the general level of this sandy feature exceeds that of the surrounding plain by more than a few inches. But owing to the luxuriant growth of tropical vegetation and the existence of palms and trees of somewhat exceptional height as compared with the ordinary species found beyond the borders of the "ridge", the latter appears to an observer approaching it from the almost featureless plain as having a level distinctly higher than his own, an illusion to which the appearance

here and there of isolated "dabbas"¹ lends considerable support. The main line of the Duk is broken in places for intervals of varying length, and for a mile, or a few hundred yards, the enveloping sea of cotton soil cuts a narrow channel through this strange tongue of land. Branching outwards in certain localities from the main feature are small arms carrying similar characteristics with them to indefinite regions in the plain outside. These are encountered unexpectedly when travelling over the surrounding country, and no attempt has yet been made to map their limits. As suddenly as the northern extremity of the Ridge passes away into the unalleviated monotony of the enveloping plain, so does its southern limit merge just as quickly and indefinitely into a like environment. But since many miles beyond, in the south of Mongalla Province, the ground and landscape seem to possess a nature like the Duk, the Ridge may with some reason be considered as an outcrop of the region further south. In any case it forms a very strange phenomenon—this narrow stretch of rich exotic vegetation set down in such an utterly contrasting region—truly an isle of tropic brilliance, ringed by the boundless waters of a dreary deep.

Upon the Ridge itself innumerable kinds of trees and undergrowth mingle with one another in profuse array. At various points along its length clusters of palms add to the neighbourhood, and for many a mile around, a touch of fairy lustre which it would not be possible to paint. There is a charm to be encountered in these quiet localities wherein the trunks of "doms,"² reaching without a branch towards the sky for a height of thirty feet or more, end in extravagantly drooping sprays of foliage, beneath which hang full many a generous clump of orange-coloured flowerets

¹ Ar. knoll.

² Local species of fruit-bearing palms.

or, in due season, the browning nuts that serve a crude humanity for food. This curious product of an irregularly watered soil consists of a mass of fibrous content shaped like a cocoanut, which it resembles also as to size and at maturity contains sufficient fruit to warrant its extraction. The natives are given to hacking the nuts to pieces and sucking at the inner core, whence they obtain the slender nourishment it can provide. The taste of this "dom" fruit is not like any other article of food the civilized are wont to eat and, while it might be well described as nondescript, is permeated by a bitterness which makes it most unpalatable except to unsophisticated appetites. Surrounded by an outer coat of brown the interior of the ripened "nut" is fully orange, and when reduced through natural desiccation to the consistency of a cocoanut, the entire fruit assumes a similar shade of brown.

A rich variety of jingly undergrowth is scattered about elsewhere upon the Ridge, but not in such great volume as to interfere with human movements, for speaking generally it is disposed in prosperous looking clumps at intervals of several yards. Some cactus forms are met with at infrequent intervals, and the diversity of tree-like bush growths is remarkable. Certain of these fill well-defined expanses at the proper time of year with rich and subtle scents, and flowering shrubs add riotous beauty to some other sections of this charmed locality. Save in those breaks of cotton soil where heavy tufted clumps obtrude themselves for a short space upon the pleasant countryside, light grasses overspread the ground like meadow hay from English pasture lands, before the scythe has laid it low, though in the winter's drought the sandy soil lies barren of this covering. Round certain "dabbas" where the soil is rich and water lurks beneath at no

great depth, large trees of numerous form and family cluster round bush-strewn knolls, and coloured foliage strikes a note of lustrous brilliancy. In some localities a park-like vista dominates the scene—a sudden clearing gives a prospect on to open grass studded with well-spaced bush, and towards trees with strands of hanging greenery. Between the seasons you will come on well-filled “fulas” round the sides of which bright-plumaged birds in great assortment preen their wings beneath the shade of overhanging bush while you are sheltering from their view, and elsewhere open pools, serving alike the needs of antelope and beast of prey, set off the grassy sward encircling them. At changing intervals the beds of shallow “khors” traverse the Ridge from side to side, but these are only filled with water at the rainy season’s height, their courses being marked by tufted grass and not infrequently “kharubs” are found in their vicinity.

Not all the “dabbas” are conspicuous in this countryside for there are many where a gently sloping mound rises for perhaps a hundred yards and then as gently falls again, attaining at its highest point no more than half a dozen feet above the normal level of the plain. But in such places will the soil be richly impregnated with a preponderance of sand, and a luxuriant tree growth, frequently fantastic in its character, will never fail to mark the feature. These richly wooded mounds seem to be associated always with an accumulation of water not far down, for only thus can these fine growths be easily accounted for, besides which every well that has been sunk upon the Ridge is to be found within the areas that such “dabbas” cover. Through the dry weather, when for miles around the limits of the Duk the parched and sunburnt plains are utterly devoid of water far below their

surface, wells and perennial "water-holes" may be relied upon continually for certain limited supplies. In the former case it may be necessary at the zenith of the annual drought to dig below the normal level of the bed, but with the latter always open to the sky the natural sumps unfailingly refill themselves, if temporarily dry, after a gentle handscoop from their sandy bottoms.

The majority of tribesmen who find shelter for the greater portion of the year within the confines of the Ridge are far too prone to sloth to undertake the manual labour needed to construct a well, and when their usual "fulas" have become exhausted they make off, like their less favoured brethren on the cotton soil, towards the rivers and the larger "khors." But as the grazing at that season of the year is much superior near the river banks it may be doubted whether they would benefit by turning their activities to such a goal.

Owing to the protective shade of trees and the more marked persistence of the water on its bed, the "fulas" situated on the Duk retain their contents, size for size, for longer periods than those others on the open plain, and the inhabitants of the former region can remain *in situ* for a corresponding increased space of time. This has considerable bearing, likewise, on the habits of the region's game, for when the main plain is devoid of water, and the habitat of most wild beasts has shifted to the river banks, there are still minor herds that roam the Duk as long as possible, preferring the isolation of a deserted zone to the more frequented borders of the "khors" and streams. And that marauding hunter of the night, the common leopard, shows a great predilection for the place, due to the combination of the spreading trees and heavy undergrowth, which furnish him with ample opportunities for

stalking other game. They find, too, in the sandy areas that surround the "dabbas", an environment for which their species seems adapted well, and there can be no doubt that both in rainy weather and in fine the going on the Ridge is far less tiring than upon the execrable surface of the plain that borders it. These animals are found in quantity within the limits of the Duk, and from one end to the other they nightly prowl and hunt amongst its "dabbas" and beneath its spacious trees. When all the pools are dry they still remain within the confines of their usual haunts, seeking the water-holes which hoofed game cannot negotiate with ease, and paying them nightly visits till they find it difficult to scoop away the sand and make the bottom ooze. Some waterholes there are, however, such as those excavated for the stationary posts of government which, largely owing to their width of mouth, and the attentions of mankind, provide the animals with water right through the drought; and in these neighbourhoods their calls are heard by night at intervals, until the coming of the rains recalls their natural prey towards the Ridge when, being no longer forced from time to time to seek that prey elsewhere, they make their presence manifest by intermittent jungle converse through the night. But in those places where a scarcity of water keeps them away until the rains have broken once again, they will be absent just for so long as the necessities of life require, and with the first few showers of a returning spring back they will come, first one and then others, until they fill their normal hunting grounds once more.

Certain other animals there are which do not ever seem to leave the Ridge—such are the Bush buck, Oribi and Duiker, game that does not exist in any other portion of the U.N.P. except, occasion-

ally, in the case of Oribi. These three species find a natural home throughout the year within this jungle region, and the last named specially are present in large numbers everywhere, relying it seems on certain small green shoots when water is no more available. It may of course be possible that these small creatures have a secret access to supplies of water hid from man, but for my part I am quite satisfied that they dispense with drinking pools for a great length of time, extracting from a few herbaceous shoots sufficient liquid nourishment to serve them till the rains return again. These qualities would also seem to be possessed by that engaging little antelope, the smallest of its kind, known as the Duiker, for he too never seems to leave his natural habitat upon the Duk. With a body much about the size of a large hare, and a head on which a pair of three-inch horns stand out like prongs, he possesses most amazing speed and when surprised makes off to cover with a wild precipitancy. His grey-brown covering of fur has much in common with a rabbit skin, though it is somewhat darker as to shade, mingling efficiently with the shadows of the undergrowth in which he moves. The "light bay" of the larger animal, the Oribi, stands out in contrast with the things surrounding it, the more especially as both its tail-tip and its belly show a predominance of white. Its wide-awake gazelle-like eyes doubtless endow it with considerable protection from the predatory stalkings of its enemies, and in the matter of agility it has a power and speed comparable only with the astounding vigour of its leaps and bounds, by means of which it clears most natural obstacles with such precision and dispatch as soon to place it far beyond whatever source of danger has appeared.

Whether or no the Bush-buck lives for a period waterless I should not care to give a definite opinion.

The creature certainly seems to leave the neighbourhood of dried-up pools, but it is likely it betakes itself to other places on the Ridge, whenever moved by thirst to do so. However, since these animals do not appear to be encountered on the banks of rivers, even towards the closing days of an abnormal drought, then if they drink at all it must be at some secret water-hole upon the Duk. The numbers dwelling in this stretch of countryside are not so great by far as in the case of Oribi. They are a singularly striking type of lesser antelope, with numerous stripes of white upon a skin that varies as to shade from chestnut to mahogany, the females having lighter hue than have the males. Their stationary bodies blend effectually with the surrounding bush and they are very difficult to spot, unless in motion. . . .

The northern limits of the Duk towards which, with a dozen police, a Nuer sheik, some ten pack animals, and my own retinue of dark-skinned minions, I was now approaching, are clearly marked by "dom" palms, and apart from a few wooded shrubs that reach a height of perhaps a foot or so above the ground, the sandy spaces at the end of this incongruous feature are for the most part of an open nature and they are covered with a fine light grass. Some "tukls" are to be seen beside the line of palms, and others come to view as one moves on. We make a halt, as soon as opportunity presents itself, to ask for guidance to the headman's hut, and here my sweating cook seeks to assuage his thirst by drinking quantities of alcoholic beverage, locally manufactured by fermenting native corn, and as he has been marching for eight hours on an almost empty stomach, the result is that he soon becomes most violently sick. Nothing on earth can be so dumbly bovine as a native of the negro strain,

and when his morale has been affected dumbly bovine does he soon become. Maladies go further than anything else in bringing this about and, in this particular case, the effect of such a sudden rebuff to his internal peace sufficed to ensure the descent of morbid gloom upon the luckless man.

On ahead lie rows of palms, and a few huge trees, on which innumerable families of marabouts have built ungainly nests, afford a welcome shade against the sun's fierce heat. Weird creatures do the young birds look, helplessly sitting on their beds of twigs and sticks, and voicing the hunger of rapacious fledgings who are incompetent to seek their food. Upon the ground below the fallen fruit lies strewn about in quantity, and though possessing no outstanding flavour it is not unpalatable, calling to mind in both its taste and look the smaller sort of apple (crab) indigenous to temperate climes.

The multitude of adult fowl gathered in this locality was quite phenomenal. There must have been full many a score of storks of this same kind all visible at once within a radius of some hundred yards. Besides those peacefully ensconced upon their nests, or settled in amongst the branches of the trees, numbers were roaming on the ground with that peculiar air of contemplative wisdom that seems a common attribute of every long-beaked bird. In the sky overhead, great circling hosts soared in the dome of heaven, and their wide evolutions covered the vaulted blue for untold distances.

The neighbourhood was haunted by another family of birds, a race of long-tailed crows with agile movements, and their jet-black feathers covered in a lustrous sheen. The incessant cawing of these pests was quite remarkable, and sometimes highly aggravating, for when a group of them had been approached too closely they would break out promptly

into orgies of vituperation and excitement, giving full vent to the most abominably raucous cries, that would be taken up immediately by neighbouring hosts.

My own bivouac was erected near these trees, yet far enough away to suffer no unpleasant liabilities likely to be incurred through the inconsequent discharges of the feathered hosts above, abundant signs of which covered the ground for some space all around; and a short hundred yards away the police had formed their lines, leaving my entourage to settle down beneath the shelter of rough bushes lying about halfway between the two. But by this time the local Nuer chief had come upon the scene, and with a horde of ruffianly appeared followers advanced to greet the perpetrator of this new intrusion on his realm. An aged rascal of a man he seemed, clad for the occasion in the remnants of a red and tattered rag, no doubt the relic of a former gown given him by the commissioner who had gone before. He raised a shaking arm in tremulous salute, and after I had grasped the clammy hand he proffered me we entered on a conversation with the aid of one of my interpreters. With the conclusion of arrangements for his "shen" to undertake the work upon a section of the road I gave him a new robe, offering the latest range of colours then available, from which he chose a very blatant scarlet hue. This he donned promptly with a due solemnity, and intercourse between us, necessarily carried on by means of more or less protracted queries and replies, commenced on my part to assume a note of persiflage and care-free banter, seeming to fill both him and his companions with a hearty mirthfulness, to which they had no hesitation in abandoning themselves; and in the old sheikh's case it soon evolved into a succession of staccato laughs and

awful grins, here and there punctuated with a mumbled monosyllable of approbation or assent. The childish joy and satisfaction thus evoked within the breasts of these wild, simple folk, just by the puerile and casual witticisms of their new commissioner; had the effect of putting all concerned into the best of humours, and with a final trend of conversation towards the case of wives in general and of his own particularly, after the way of peoples it must be admitted, much more highly civilised, the final stages of this pleasant little interlude were crowned with notes of unrestrained hilarity.

The local populace, only a few of whom were dwelling in the immediate neighbourhood, registered great astonishment at the potentialities of bill-hook and of hatchet in the direction of utilitarian sabotage, this being the first time they had seen such instruments, and the police, who felt themselves invested with a measure of reflected glory, indulged in frequent exhibitions of their prowess in the employment of these tools.

The ruddy, bulging orb of day has settled now on the horizon, and the deep solitude of the encircling plain, confined by daylight to the borders of the Duk, starts to extend its influence across these jungled bournes. Dusk falls quickly, as ever in the tropics, and twilight's hush falls gently over tree and palm. The smoke from hut and bivouac rises up slowly to the sky, to vanish in the impending gloom. Whispering draughts of an evening breeze give rise to subtle murmurs in the foliage high above, and boughs and branches under the influence of sudden airs sigh in quiet harmony with one another. The silvered satellite of Earth later appears within the starlit heavens, diffusing all the landscape in the serenity of her romantic light. From afar off across the plain comes the long howl of a hyaena

wandering alone, to break at intervals upon the nocturnal peace, and passing gradually beyond the range of human hearing as the base creature moves through the night upon its way. Camp-fires flicker bravely in the darkness, and upon the stillness of the scene there fall the restless shiftings of the mules, the sounds of stamping feet and jangling chains. The pleasant balm of evening has surrendered to the fragrant coolness of the fallen night, and the descending peace of Allah soon leads wearied souls to rest. . . .

Within the linen-walled prison of my mosquito-net, stretched high across a camp-bed resting on the soil beneath the spacious branches of an enormous tree, I dose contentedly in perfect peace with the surrounding world. There are some bushes growing round three sides of the inornate couch on which I lie, but no sound comes from them to vex the continuance of my slumber. And so in company with the ascending traverse of the moon across the sky the night moves on. . . .

Awakened later by some unknown chance I gaze upward through the silver speckled branches overhead, vaguely aware of some intruding force as the direct cause of my return to consciousness. Hark! whence that low, ghostly purring note that floats upon my ken? And the weird moaning cry that follows it? Nearer and nearer seem those eerie sounds to come, until with a suspicious suddenness they cease their frequency and then are heard no more. But sleep evades me, for I feel that these are leopards near at hand, and their voices, falling upon my ears for the first time, imbue me with a curious sense of fascination: I surmise that they will pass this way, following the native path towards the bivouac, where they will seek some unexpected prey among the tethered mules. In a little while the

faintest rustle comes from the bush surrounding me and after that another. By the queer sense that tells the mind of an unseen, unheard and untouched presence I can sense that just outside the shelter of my linen covering a beast is watching me. I know too, later, it has moved away, and in a little while the pall of slumber has descended on me once again.

The morning breaks and soon my haggard visaged cook informs me he has slept but little through the night. He reports that he was worried ceaselessly by leopards, which he was forced to drive away at oft recurring intervals owing to their stealthy and persistent movements round about. I have not ever heard of one of these attacking anyone except when wounded or unless exceptionally provoked, but it is always best to be prepared for unforeseen emergencies in all encounters with the wild, and to the beasts that prowl by night this maxim needs observance all the more. From the police as well I learnt that through the night they had been greatly exercised in the protection of the mules, round which a number of the animals had gathered under cover of the undergrowth, prowling continuously up and down amongst the shadows and the moonlit spaces of the camp. Such was the formidable state of their attentions that, as patrolling and the usual fires seemed to possess fast lessening power to thwart them in their zeal, one of the watchers had fired a shot at one of the stealthy horde. By the grace of fortune, so thought I, the round had failed to meet its mark, for with a wounded leopard charging a crowd of drowsy Sudanese, firing point-blank in heaven knows how many different ways, the casualties were likely to be far more numerous from human agency than from any other cause. . . .

Along the Duk Ridge there runs a native path, and as the work involved in clearing it had not by

any means a pressing claim but rather one to meet at leisure as the occasion came, I resolved to push ahead at once across the twenty miles or so that lay between us and the district headquarters—that is to say, Ayod. The general nature of the country has already been described—suffice it to relate that once quit of the most northerly of all the “shens” that dwell upon this strip of soil, only a few odd “tukls” are encountered on the south-bound track. There are off-shoots leading to the various villages situated either on the borders of the Ridge or hidden away in some secluded spot in the interior, but such will never obtrude themselves upon the eye unless a search be made for them.

During our march we came quite suddenly upon a little batch of “tukls” lying close beside the path. As soon as one of the skinny-looking denizens of this small settlement had noticed our approach the word was quickly passed to every hut, and following on this unforeseen descent upon their privacy a panic seized upon the wretched villagers, who fled helter-skelter into the bush in all directions. A man seized up his spear and rushed incontinently off without apparent rhyme or reason, having bestowed one fearful glance upon the advancing throng. I waved my hand to him in cordial fashion, laughing a hearty laugh at his precipitancy, but ere I turned my head to speak to one of my policemen he was gone. As we reached the nearest “tukl” the pitiable figure of an aged and stooping man, casting upon us looks of abject terror, tottered away across his “dura” patch as fast as his quivering sticks of legs could carry him. From out the entrance to his home there groped a trembling female, gathering up a fly-embroidered piccaninny to her arms and carting it off towards the bush, dashing ahead in one direction and at the same time looking back across her shoulder

in the other, just as if she thought this band of interlopers might be moved to follow after her full cry. Not a soul remained.

It had been impressed upon me earlier that in certain areas covered by my district such a state of things as that described above must be expected, being in fact a not uncommon incident, and though accepting it as one which I could not immediately influence, not being well enough acquainted with the underlying circumstances, I made a mental note forthwith upon the need for gaining personal acquaintance with the "nass".¹

Other villages there are near by Ayod; the nearest, situated off the main track at a distance of about a mile, cannot be seen except a special detour for the purpose be decided on. There is a rich luxuriance of undergrowth in this locality, the trees are clothed exuberantly with serried foliage, and in due course as I bore down on the imposing "dabba" upon which that distant centre had been built it seemed to me that in my expectations of a fairy region round about it I should not be greatly disabused. A short, open, grassy space separates the low sandy mound known as "Duk" Ayod from a like region to the immediate north of it. Appearing late in the afternoon upon the limits of this clearing, my little band was quickly spotted by the watchers at the post, who had already been apprised of our arrival on the Ridge by Nuer runners from the neighbourhood of our last camp. News travels speedily across these savage-haunted plains, and there is not an agent of the government, be he policeman or commissioner, who can hope to cloak his presence from a neighbouring "shen" for any greater length of time than is required for local spearmen to bestride the ground between the

¹ Ar. people.

neighbourhoods concerned. The prompt dispatch of information dealing with the movements of authority seems to be looked on almost as a point of honour with these tribes, and only at a great expense to comfort can they be even temporarily outdone.

After some months of lonely, undirected watching through the rains, the small police force at Ayod, ringed round by "shens" of doubtful loyalty to government and unassisted by the leadership of either D.C. or "mamur", showed every sign of jubilation at this welcome reinforcement of their ranks; indeed they seemed to look upon our entry as a certain proof that all the tribulations of the season past were now removed, welcoming us as men will do their rescuers in some beleaguered city. As we passed the police lines the shrill melodious trilling of Sudāni women fell on the air with gratifying sounds of plauditory, and aged men of war came up to greet their comrades and a new-found chief. The "shawish" (sergeant) in charge of the station introduced himself with a pleasing grin—his broad face beamed with a glow of confidence and obvious satisfaction. An assorted pack of mongrel pariahs, viewing the source of this intrusion with suspicious, hungry eyes, set up a din of noxious potency, which did not cease until the cavalcade had passed beyond the precincts of the lines. Thus did we journey to Ayod across the unmapped plains.

CHAPTER VIII

AYOD

During the course of the preceding year my predecessor had been sent to take sole charge of the Gaweirs, amongst whom I now found myself, and to establish his headquarters on the "Duk" in a convenient spot as near as possible to Awoi, from which there was a telephone to Khor Atar by way of the Zeraf. Having selected Duk Ayod as the most favoured site available, he set to work to excavate a well, and in due time was able to complete a quasi-military post reflecting perspicacity and acumen that was a striking witness to the vigour of the man. Around the well was a zareba ten yards square made up of broken twigs and prickly bush, and interlaced with barbed wire forming entanglements, so that the whole became a kind of military citadel—as its creator had in fact desired. Around this inner work there stood the main redoubt, a level area having its sides about a hundred yards in length, around the edge of which there had been dug a trench some ten feet wide and five feet deep. The exterior of this trench was piled with a mass of tangled brush and undergrowth and on the north side was the entrance to the post, provided with a barrier (moveable) of log and brush. Facing this gate and standing roughly fifty yards away outside the post were the police lines—two rows of "tukls" where the force was lodged, together with their

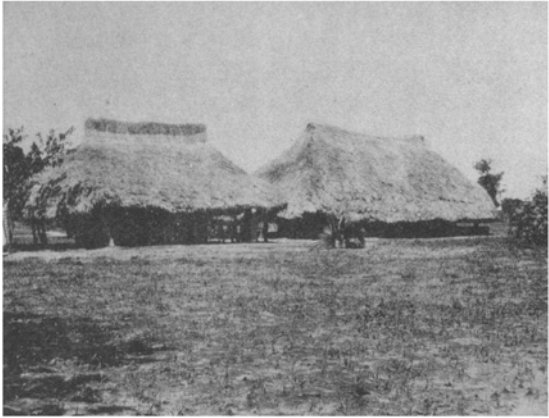
wives and families. Beyond these lay the several plots of "dura" that belonged to them, and some short distance from the lines were the establishments of certain nondescript camp followers who had previously attached themselves to us for sundry reasons. Then the official interpreter (nuer and arabic)—an insidious looking senile, biblical of mien, for whom I soon acquired a sneaking fancy—he too occupied a "tukl" on the outskirts of the lines.

Within the post there were the following. Firstly near the centre of the southern border stood a mud-walled house for the commissioner, and at its side a chamber made to stereotyped mosquito-proof design. This latter proved the only habitation fit for use as far as I was then concerned. Covering an area roughly fifteen feet by ten the mosquito netting that composed it reached to a height of seven feet or more, and over the top was a protecting roof of thatch, supported on limbs of trees fixed firmly in the ground. This roof came to within a space of three feet from the soil outside the netting, so that below it the air had access to the inner chamber, through the perforations of the wire screen. A cement flooring had been laid across half of the interior, the remaining floor-space showing the natural sandy soil of the surrounding ground. The upper boarding of the wooden frame fitted against the interior slope of the roof, and over the top of the chamber there hung linen shrouds as a protection from the droppings of the bats referred to later, and to exclude obnoxious insects harboured by the thatch above, beneath which it was quite effective as a screen. Just outside the door of the "namleyer" (mosquito-house) stood the "zeer" (porous earthen water-container), fixed on a wooden stand which held a bucket to receive the water as it filtered through.

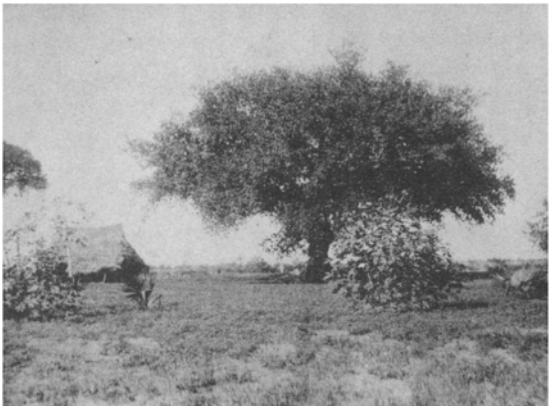
(A)



(B)



(C)



(A) AYOD—CENTRAL WELL ON RIGHT.
(B) AYOD COMMISSIONER'S QUARTERS.
(C) AYOD—VIEW FROM COMMISSIONER'S QUARTERS.

There may be some who, lacking knowledge of the life in hotter climates, are not aware of many principles associated with the working of some common articles in general use. Amongst such must the "zeer" take pride of place, offering its owner (and there is hardly anyone so poor as not to own it) a ready means towards enjoying water that has been well filtered and is also cool. This vessel is a very simple one, and it is fashioned (in an infinity of mouldings, shapes, and sizes) from a blend of earths found suitable for making unglazed pottery. The vessel has a porous body: water poured into it immediately begins to filter slowly through its sides, evaporating rapidly under the influence of the heat. Thus the contents are quickly cooled and they can be poured out from the "zeer" as needed or allowed to leak through from its base into a wide receptacle—and in the latter case the "zeer" will act as both a filter and a purifier. During the rains, in periods of clouded skies, as on those still oppressive days when the surrounding atmosphere is moisture-laden, the vessel loses most of its efficiency in both directions—dry air, a wind, or the direct rays of the sun, these are essential factors in its proper functioning; though in the last case care must be taken that its lower part is shielded else may the water well evaporate more quickly than it is filtering through, and so prevent the flow of liquid through its pores. For cooling purposes alone, however, this safeguard may be looked upon as quite unnecessary, and as a fact the natives do not usually regard a "zeer" as more than handy means of practical refrigeration, leaving consideration of the water's purity to its appointed place amongst the false and curious notions of their overlords. In this they suffer little hurt, particularly in the south of the Sudan, where the uncontaminated waters

of the Nile must undergo the cleansing, catalytic influences of sun and reed during their passage through the equatorial swamps that cover more than one distinctive area in that region of the world.

Passing now from conjured visions of a desolation whereon there is certainly no need to dwell, allow your thoughts to dwell again upon the picture of the Ayod post, glancing in imagery from the threshold of the mosquito-house towards the mud-built residence that stands some ten feet off. Doubtless originally built under the force of practical considerations, this curious masterpiece of local soils and fibres had in all probability served the purpose of its first erection, giving the amateur whose own design it followed such a luxurious sense of ease as could be had in like environments. Let me not seem to bring disparagement upon the work of my efficient predecessor, for he had builded well, but in the months that passed between the early days of its inception and its existing state disuse had culminated in the deterioration of its structure, rendering it uninhabitable to one more exercised for his own comfort than for his daily privacy. Persistent rains, in beating down upon the heavy roof of thatch, had been unable to affect the mud-built walls, but after many months of close attention they had so permeated all the fibrous grass with which the roof had been assembled that it was now a teeming hot-bed of the many kinds of insects common to the land. The inopportune surrenders of these loathly creatures to the normal force of gravity rendered the thought of any adaptation of the shelter of this primitive affair to my own needs entirely incompatible with sane precautions for my personal health. Destitute of flooring other than the sandy soil upon which it stood, the interior was partitioned off by side-walls

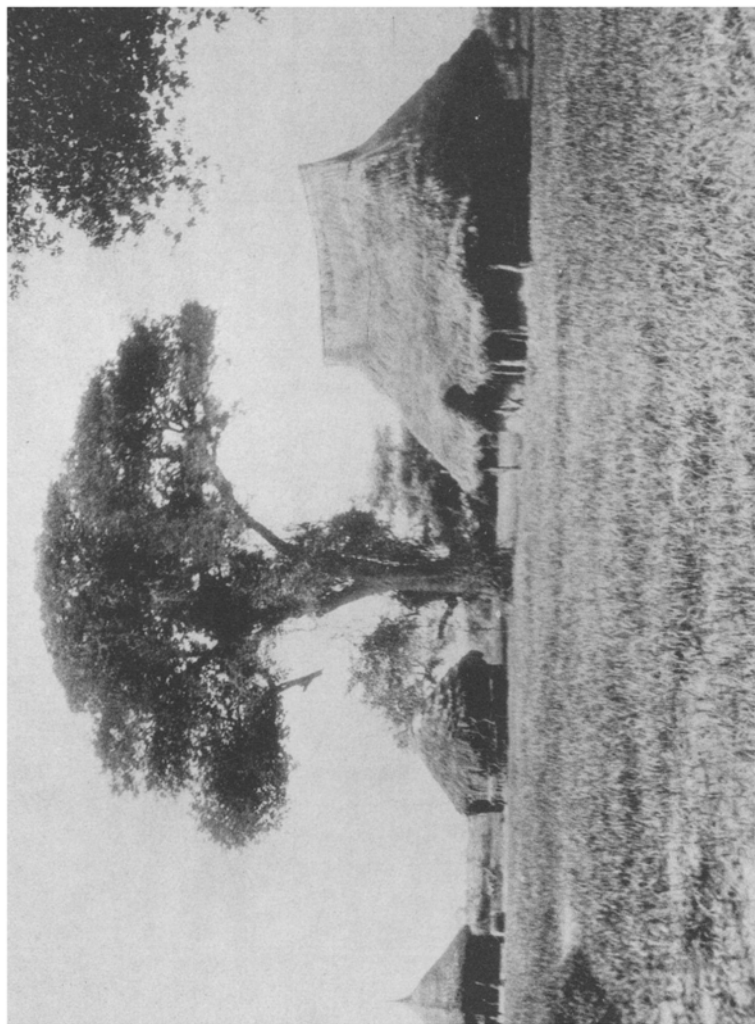
into three small chambers of unequal size ; the inner two were practically devoid of light and furnished suitable accommodation up aloft for a prodigious clan of bats which had become habituated to co-operative retirement on the mildewed rafters through the daylight hours. Resentful of intrusions on their peaceful slumbers, and doubtless actuated by the same promptings towards the sanctity of their retreat as those by which their kind is influenced in European barns and belfries, these insect-eating creatures of the night were wont to agitate themselves to such a pitch of fluttering activity, as soon as anyone burst in upon their privacy, that it would almost seem as if a host of flies had been disturbed while still enjoying some abominable feast, and were now buzzing round in fierce anticipation of the chance to make another visit to the scene of their revolting feed. But of all the lower forms of life infesting the vicinity not one attained to so remarkable a prevalence as did the termite. Every wooden upright, every exterior and interior wall, was covered with a skein of miniature earthed tunnels, built up by tireless legions of the tribe. Nothing of fibrous content could be put away in safety for as long as twenty-four hours without incurring risks of depredations on the part of these insidious multitudes. Their activities were not confined entirely to the house, for they abound in myriads over the Sudan, but on the site of which I speak they were established with a fierce tenacity that total demolition of the premises alone could have effectively opposed—inevitable consequences of neglect through rain and drought alike.

Around these two adjacent quarters small but vigorous and motley bands of lizards frisked around ceaselessly by day in sun and shadow, giving themselves without concern to smart reptilian gambols,

or maybe sheltering from the midday heat under the eaves of thatch. It was amusing sometimes just to watch the agile frolickings amongst this brisk and well disposed community, and though in the main distrustful of advances by mankind, couched though they might be in the friendliest of terms, beyond the point which they regarded as compatible with their security, it seemed they would appreciate the effort made to furnish them with their most relished food, and take advantage of it when the local coast was clear. Unable by themselves to breach the soily incrustations of the luscious termite, they displayed alacrity in lapping up the scurrying hosts that poured from any breaks in the continuity of their defences brought about by human agency, and the promptitude with which such heaven-sent breaches were surrounded by an eager, nimble coterie of lizards gathered together from all corners of the house was only paralleled by the extreme avidity that characterised the ensuing feast.

Under such circumstances, the existence of a space of concrete flooring in the mosquito-house might well be held a godsend, for it of course gave a clean and level patch on which to place a camp-bed and belongings vulnerable to the attacks of termite hosts.

Imbued with the high motives of a pioneer that prompt him so to fashion all his schemes that they will benefit successors in the coming years, my predecessor had with some foresight planted up the post with different trees and bushes, hoping in this way to increase its few amenities in course of time. Castor oil saplings decked the ground between the house and the central well, an odd palm or two had since begun to register a seeming fixity of tenure as the result of plantings in the neighbourhood, and



AYOD: THE OFFICE.

between the "namleyer" and the entanglement of the redoubt a fair-sized lemon-bush was growing. Some smaller specimens of the same kind had been disposed at even intervals outside the quarter, and on my first arrival seemed to be flourishing. The large bush had commenced to fruit and later furnished me with excellent supplies of the small type of lemon. Of the remainder, all of which needed careful nursing through the annual drought, and frequent watering, it may be said that for a year or so after our first acquaintance they prospered well, but all fell victims later to the reckless conduct of my cook who, unknown to me, over a period whilst I was engaged in curing skins, emptied the daily contents of a pail of salt and alum over the ground in which their roots were bedded.

Removed at a respectful distance from the commissioner's house and situated near the southwest corner of the redoubt stood the kitchen "tukl" and the servants' quarters—elementary affairs that served their purpose and no more; while in line with all these buildings, filling a space within the corner opposite, there were installed what are colloquially termed "the usual offices", though it is hardly necessary to hint in this case that the use of such an epithet could scarcely be more inappropriate or of more fabulous pretence.

It will accordingly be realised that the south face of the redoubt was given over solely to the D.C. and his domestic staff. In the centre of the eastern face a "court room" had been built along the usual lines; the same skill, conception and materials had been responsible for its production as had resulted in the erection of the house, and as the roof was in so porous a condition as to be verging on collapse, one of my prior tasks was to arrange for its replace-

ment by an efficient substitute. At the north-west corner of the redoubt accommodation for a "mamur" had been built, and this quite unpretentious dwelling harboured as nearly numerous a tenantry of bats and ants and bustling denizens of the insect world as occupied the interior of its counterpart. Nearby, along the northern face, was a covered-in shelter for the mules and donkeys—a provision against the inroads of wild beasts into the post, and as it lay within the actual limits of the latter it gave them almost absolute security. A shelter for the bachelor police and, close at hand, a small thatched guard-room, occupied the space between this corner of the work and the sole entrance situated in the middle of the northern face; mention of these concludes the record.

In this restricted area three or four spacious trees, one of which is growing near the central well and the remainder set along the eastern boundary, effectually prevent the semblance of formality or barrenness that otherwise might well have been associated with a settlement of military design, for besides providing welcome shade they are themselves magnificent productions of the soil, towering to great heights and spreading out their branches richly clothed with leaves, which give effect to striking colour-changes through the year.

As soon as news of my arrival in the station had been noised abroad, various deputations from the neighbouring chiefs began to assemble in the place, the womenfolk bearing upon their heads or in their hands, according to the size of the containers, a large enough supply of milk to have refreshed the greater portion of the station's human roll, and in effect went far towards allowing the police enjoyment of an article of diet none too easily procured

in districts such as these. It is rare for a commissioner to fail to satisfy his own especial needs in this direction, but as the natives are accustomed to regard this natural product as their staple source of food there is not generally a surplus for the outside world.

Through the necessity for water conservation at the season of the year that follows on the finish of the rains, when the accumulated sources of supply have to be carefully preserved, and all endeavours made to husband them so that the natives' yearly exodus towards the river may be deferred as long as possible, a most revolting practice has sprung up amongst the dwellers in these lands, and in the guise of practical necessity seems to have entered into general usage as an accepted rite. Since not a drop of water is available except for drinking purposes, the cleansing of all articles in daily use as food-containers such, for example, as the "garas" previously referred to, is effected by an impartial use of human urine with results that do not seem to bring disaster to the health, digestion, or composure of the many who make later use of these same articles. It is incumbent, therefore, upon anyone to whom a practice of this nature does not at best possess the least appeal, to make arrangements to ensure he does not fall a victim to it unawares, for otherwise the thing is likely to result without delay. One most regrettable experience in my own case was sufficient to impress on me the need for furnishing my own receptacles, and of deputing a reliable attorney to make certain that the animal selected for my special wants was milked direct into the pot or jug supplied.

Following on a generally accepted principle of policy, the arrival of these various chiefs was marked by liberal distributions of new robes, with the result

that several hearty "starkos" who had arrived from the station with nothing to boast about except a head of unkempt hair and a dangerous-looking spear, were able to depart homewards in a riot of coloured gowns. Amongst these leaders of a darkling barbarism there was one Dwal Diu—the son of a deceased Nuer chief whose influence over his tribe extended far beyond the limits of his own or neighbouring "shens", and whose days of conflict with the government had been both long and intermittent. His successor, a splendid-looking specimen of garbless savagery, was a youth still in his early twenties, standing well over six feet high and with a body finely proportioned to his height. Over his fellows at this time he had not yet attained ascendancy to be compared with what his predecessor wielded, but he was probably known as well amongst the Nuers, if not by sight then by repute at least, for in small measure he had assumed the mantle of his father, lacking experience only, and requiring time before his personality could fill the part of tribal dominance left vacant by the former's death. In the bosom of his immediate following, which included two or three "shens" besides his own, he was regarded with respect that bordered almost on fanaticism, and he was no doubt seeking to extend his influence as chance occurred. Apart from all hereditary associations and his fine physique, there was a yet more potent reason for his accepted leadership, and this lay in his assumption of the offices of a "Kujur"—the term applied to what appears elsewhere to have received the designation of a "medicine man." In the case of the Nuers at all events, any attribute of medicinal powers seems to be altogether lacking, but on the other hand the individual laying claim to such a style is credited with supernatural powers that assist decisively in strengthening his

hold upon the people. Of course the whole idea associated with this barbarous scheme may quickly be dismissed as coming in the general category of "ramps," although the situation is not made less picturesque for quiet students of the human fold.

At a later period there will be a fitting reference to Dwal Diu in his pretentious rôle as a "Kujur." For the moment he retires from my presence with the humility of an untutored savage honouring the places of the ruling power, and on most counts he finds favour in my eyes, as likewise do his weird attendant satellites. One of these men, another glorious primitive of ancient Grecian build, conveys through the interpreter an intimation of internal ill, and with the easy confidence of a well-informed practitioner I prescribe a double dose of Epsom Salts, to be administered upon the spot, ensuring thus its actual application to the affected part. At my next meeting with this cheerful sufferer he tells me with a grin that my prescription proved its efficiency in no uncertain fashion, whereon both he and friends accompanying him roar forth crude strains of savage mirth at this allusion to his inner man.

As soon as the "fulas" on the Duk were dry and the Ayod post remained the sole surviving habitat of human beings, the main sphere of my work lay in the surrounding plains, and consisted of some long itineraries that included visits to the various "shens" now settled at their "marahs"¹ far away. Tribute collection, too, was also to be numbered with the things assigned to my especial care, but before this a little time was to elapse, and after a few days at headquarters, during which I settled

¹ Watering-places for men and cattle in the dry weather.

down to my surroundings and initiated various tasks requiring prompt attention, I complied with orders sent up by the governor summoning me to Malakal, and so returned along the newly-fashioned way to Khor Atar.

CHAPTER IX

SAFARIA FROM AYOD

At the conclusion of a four-day journey to the post at Khor Atar—the point which I had come to look on as my base—a journey neither marred nor marked by an unusual incident, but which involved a deal of strenuous “safari”, there greeted me the pleasing vision of the governor’s gunboat, and the yet still more gladdening presence of my predecessor at Ayod, who in the course of various duties on the river in connection with his Shilluk tribes had been instructed to convey me back to Malakal on the completion of his work. In consequence of which the joy of lingering moments in a fairly modern bath (h. and c., h. problematical, and too dependent on the vagaries of boiler pressure), filled with Nile water rendered none the less acceptable by reason of its crop of weeds and granular suspensions, and some peculiar parasites of infusorial prototype, had soon transported me in fancy to the heavens, and with loud song and merry ribaldry the proof of my tempestuous happiness was borne upon the patient, suffering consciousness of an understanding friend and colleague. On the following morning we arrived at Malakal and I was billeted upon the province engineer, who was extremely hospitable and entertaining. Though the chief reason for my visit had been suggested as the need for a short rest before embarking on the main activities that lay before me, there were some points requiring

due consideration which could not be dealt with satisfactorily except by personal discussion with the governor; thus a return into the fold of government by memo, document, and decree was not devoid of its advantages. The aspect of the neighbourhood had greatly changed since my departure—trees were fast losing all their foliage, and the long grass, deprived of moisture, had been burnt up or trampled underfoot, leaving the vision unimpeded over the plain that stretched away beyond the further bank. Where before nothing but a sea of green monotony had met the eye, many small villages could now be seen dotted about across the wider stretch of country that had since been rendered visible. Instead of the muddy quagmires that were such common features everywhere patches of unencumbered soil alone remained, and it was possible to walk about the station with an expedition that had not been possible before. Above all, the great humidity of Malakal, accentuated then by the luxuriant vegetation, had given way to a dry atmosphere that corresponded with experience on the plains beyond, and life was quite a bearable existence from climatic points of view. However, even at the best of times the amenities of Malakal can hardly warrant more than passing note, and after a few days there I was right pleased to shake its dust from off my feet. The governor used to amuse himself by taking his wife out in a small sailing boat when the evening breeze made such a proposition feasible, and together they would engage in a little Nile fishing before the onset of the deepening twilight prompted their return. An occasional game of tennis on the only court available (it was in the governor's garden) offered a little healthful exercise, yet had indeed but small appeal to one who wished to seek the rigours of the solitary plains and handle with effect the treasures of a sporting inventory.

The host of scratching, mangy dogs infesting the locality were legion and seemed to have become especially conspicuous now that the screen of vegetation covering it through the rains had been reduced by drought to minimum proportions. One of these creatures narrowly escaped a summary extinction at the point of my revolver, after paying frequent visits to a special bed which he had scraped for himself near our verandah entrance, but with the charmed existence of his kind he managed to escape by the proverbial hair's breadth, making away full cry at lightning speed, to perpetrate anew a life of miserable scavenging from which he should have long ago been mercifully released.

It was during my short stay here that one of those engaging little shows of native jostling gave me a chance of witnessing the spectacle of an unstaged inter-tribal Shilluk raid, and later also, of assuming the Canutian rôle of stemming the opposing tides of battle which had begun to rise before the view of the inhabitants of Malakal upon the further bank. First news of untoward events, that is, events towards which the official attitude must seek expression in the adoption of a disapproving frown, came to me after lunch as I was resting in the seclusion of the pleasant quarters of my host. It happened that no other senior representative of the administration was on the spot, the governor having left for some place on the river with another of his staff; and in the circumstance the "Sagh" approached me with the information that a band of Shilluks from a neighbouring village just across the Nile had entered into conflict with the members of a similar community over a dispute concerned with fishing rights, and that the prospects of a small-scale battle were distinctly promising, both parties having now retired to their villages with ominous intent. As I walked out along

the central avenue it was quite clear that martial movements were in progress. Immediately opposite there was a band of raiders, numbering roughly fifty strong, who were advancing along the river bank towards a village situated to the south about a mile away. Chanting their battle cantos as they went, they would rush forward a few paces all together, halt, step back as if rallying, and then surge forward once again as a concerted host. The effect was certainly more picturesque than terrifying, more reminiscent of the pantomime than of the drama. Each warrior held his "hippo" shield aloft, and with his spear poised gracefully in the other hand, gave himself up to rhythmic caperings alongside his companions. The sight was most spectacular and was in fact a real and not a mimic war dance. Sixty or seventy yards away a smaller band of braves were to be seen retiring towards their village, and on approach to it reserves appeared upon the scene who quickly swelled the retreating warriors' ranks until the latter now possessed a marked superiority of numbers. So were the tables turned on the attackers, who soon commenced to beat an orderly retreat before their opponents' onward march. Each force was active in the war dance, and though there followed now both march and countermarch neither side seemed inclined to start a serious attack. In the meantime orders had been sent to them to cease hostilities, and when both parties had retired to their respective villages the diversion seemed to have ended on a happy note. A short while afterwards, however, news came to me from the P.E. that hostilities had been re-opened with fresh vigour and now bore semblance of an animus not to be quieted by the gentle flow of words. Realising that appropriate action must involve my presence on the other side, the province engineer had given orders for the "Shabluka" to be

got under steam at once, and before long I was crossing over towards the point to which the scene of combat had by now been turned. As soon as it had dawned on the contending parties that the authorities were occupied with their affairs, their ranks showed signs of wavering, and when the steamer had been drawn in to the bank nearby unceremoniously and a brisk figure clad in khaki shorts had lightly sprung ashore across a plank precipitately lowered from the bows, signs of confusion soon descended on them and they commenced to melt away towards a village lying about two miles or so inland. The greater number of them broke into a run and made off helter-skelter; stragglers of varying staying powers, however, added continually to the expanding line of warriors stretching for several hundred yards in front of me. An interpreter accompanied me upon this rather unexpected chase, and in due course we reached a village centre where the parties had reformed under their leaders. As we approached it became clearly manifest that though their spears had for the moment been discarded by consent as means of argument, signs of dissension were still rampant in their midst, although the combatants were now disposed in bodies separated from each other by some twenty yards. The leaders having first been summoned, their respective followers squatted on the ground on either side of me and the discordant chantings that were in progress as I reached the spot now turned to silence while this war-like conference was being held. I quickly made the views of the administration absolutely clear to the assembled hordes through their two spokesmen, and having thrust dire threats of retribution, confiscatory and otherwise, upon their notice, ordered the warriors to disperse to their own villages with an assurance that the cause of their dispute would

later be investigated by the "Mek" and a decision reached. Whereat these lately warring hosts, whose martial ardour had begun to lose the essence of its first tempestuousness, rose to voice further war-like harmonies and then depart in peace. After which the khaki-clad judiciary made with all speed towards the boat, crossing the Nile to seek due solace in a cup of tea. . . .

In order further to improve the highway to Ayod without encroachment on the more important duties that attached to my position, arrangements had been made for a "mamur" to be posted to my district, and he would undertake the supervision of the work thereby involved, freeing me to divide my time amongst the scattered "shens" now settled all along the banks of the Zeraf and by the sides of many "khors" connected with it. Thus in the early days of January I found myself once more at Khor Atar, staffed by a "mamur" named Khamis Effendi, one of the Sudanese transferred from army duties to assist the civil power. In the course of my experience of this most voluptuous looking individual I found him just about as unreliable as a subordinate could ever be; on the other hand he was imbued with definitely sporting instincts, and being of a very cheerful disposition he appealed to me, under the somewhat primitive conditions that surrounded the administration of my zone, as being quite an admirable helpmeet for the work in hand. A more plausible example of humanity can scarcely have existed. He was indeed the acme of blandiloquence, an artist on the stage of flummery, and a prince of unctuousness. The dulcet tones of his expressive, honeyed speech would have disarmed a world of criticism, and the address which he on all occasions brought to the assistance of a good military bearing went

a long way towards maintaining an effective balance to his gross shortcomings. Showing a zeal that was confined to his exterior alone, alike regardless of all precepts, principle and detail, he was for ever full of schemes beyond the likelihood of execution. His richly moulded speech fell on a listener's ears as honey from the comb drips lusciously upon the ground: there was a curious fascination in his measured choice of words. To hear his loud assurance "Iwa, Genarbuk"¹—delivered in those suavely modulated tones to which the arab tongue can lend itself so well, was to be satisfied that everything within the garden should have been sublime; as for the expression of a note of passing optimism, rendered with such embellishments of speech as could apply and couched in the greatest euphony of phrase that he could summon from the source at his command, this was both epic and unique. When Yuzbashi Khamis Effendi started a sentence or a conversation with the words "O Genarbuk," you knew full well a flood of panegyrics was on the point of being poured into your ears and you awaited the ensuing rush of protestations in the knowledge that they were devoid of all significance whatever, to be regarded simply as an outcome of the inborn tendency towards hyperbole that was a basic trait in the mentality of this most prosperous native officer. Accompanying him upon the journey was a dusky, bright-eyed houri, whom he would euphemistically refer to as his "sitta",² but who in fact was but the victim of a passing whim. This charmer he installed at Khor Atar, surrounding her with comforts and domestic luxuries upon a scale that she no doubt considered adequate, and must in any case have been the envy of her far less favoured though respectably domesticated kind.

¹ "Yes, your honour."

² Lady, princess, wife.

The journey back towards Ayod did not resemble anything so much as a great travelling circus, for in addition to the mules and donkeys and police, a composite array of female persons, representing wives and families of men at headquarters, went with the party on its march, bearing that strange agglomeration of diverse utensils that are to be associated with the households of such folk. The number of these hapless creatures, upon whom chiefly fell, of course, the burden of transporting their own goods, was quite considerable, comprising as it did a motley crowd of individuals whose ages ranged from that of muling infancy to the maturity of thirty years, so that the pilgrimage across a scorching plain with water unavailable except at daily intervals of twenty miles, was of necessity accompanied by a great degree of hardship, and when the party reached its journey's end at last, fervent indeed became the testimony of exhausted women calling on Allah to bear witness to the sufferings they had just endured.

As was to be expected, my return to the Duk Ridge came as a climax to the expectations of a crowd of tribal litigants who on the first occasion possible hastened to lay their several complaints before me. Nuer cases, it has been remarked before, always embody certain common features; that is to say, there is incessant trouble over the cow, the ox, or else the woman that is kept, or should be kept within his gates.

In every district all commissioners are faced with the responsibility of keeping "case books,"—no serious task provided pleadings are inserted point by point as they proceed. Such a tome found its place in the office at Ayod, and it was not long before the existing register had been extended by some further records of my own. As probably ninety-five per cent. of these went by default, the work could

hardly be accounted difficult, and the decision to be given rarely called for exercise of any great discrimination. It was more usually a matter of PONG DENG being given one, two or three "cow damages" against PING BANG (defendant did not appear). Where obstacles upon occasion did arise, however, was in the subsequent enforcement of the first decree. That usually implied the despatch of some policemen to the uncertain lodgement of PING BANG, who with their approach almost invariably betook himself to other quarters. Nevertheless, in course of time PONG DENG would generally get the whole or at least a bare proportion of his lawful damages. Costs too, were not left unconsidered. Claimant was never hurt by such, but on the other hand defendant, if he should fail to meet the charge within a reasonable time, was mulcted to the extent of a young bull which would accrue to the provincial budget in due course. A fruitful cause of these disputes originated in the ante-feudal marriage system, the outstanding feature in a case concerned with matters of this kind being the almost certain presence of the two contending parties, judgment but rarely going by default.

It is the custom with the Nuers to allow their womenfolk a perfect freedom in the final instance in their acceptance or rejection of a suitor, but if accepted the successful suitor is compelled to pay such head of cattle to the father of the bride as is in consonance with his material wealth. A poor man who possesses, say, one cow, or perhaps no cow at all, is thus most naturally inclined to undertake a raid upon a distant "shen" with the sole object of procuring wherewithal to buy a wife. Should he be successful in this raid, and the animal eventually be traced (and it is generally traced at last) to its new owner (who is the raider's relative-in-law), the

latter being forced into disgorging the effects of his receivership, this may bring down a heap of curses on the son-in-law, but as that individual now has the wife whose value in the marriage market has been seriously affected by her loss of maidenhood, some complications will inevitably ensue. Then is it that the trouble will commence in earnest, for in effect, the pa-in-law now says, "the lady or the cow my boy". At this stage an appeal is often made to the commissioner, who if he has true sympathy with love's young dream will somehow manage to secure an animal from somewhere, or the promise of an animal at some future date, so that the gallant may retain his bride. Although her choice is free, as I have said, this does not save the maiden suitored by an eligible swain from being the butt of fierce expostulations on the part of relatives with eyes upon the spoils of marriage they may later claim, for a father-in-law is forced by custom to divide the bridal payment up between the members of the family in certain recognised proportions, should the proceeds of her sale amount to a sufficient head of cattle.

These principles of matrimonial barter are not without peculiar disadvantages and operate in many instances as two-edged swords, recoiling on the heads of parents with as great facility as that with which they rob a man of certain of his worldly goods. For a bride may be returned at will, that is, at least, throughout the time that she remains desirable, when her full value at the time of marriage, less some deduction for depreciation in the interim (assessable between the parties), may then be credited to the account of the first purchaser. If a wife either leaves her husband, to seek again the bosom of her family, or is returned to them owing to his dissatisfaction with her either on general or on special

grounds, father-in-law must part with an agreed percentage of his bovine legacy. This is invariably distasteful to him, for as in other more advanced parts of the East, girls are regarded merely as financial assets, to be exchanged for other goods as suitable occasion may arise. Ask him which he prefers and he will name the cattle every time. Since the majority of youthful spouses have but one bull to barter, the return of any wife will usually imply the loss in toto of her sale consideration, and this is where a further source of argument will frequently arise. For all that, matrimonial alliances amongst these savage peoples seem on the whole to reach a fair degree of cow-like happiness and a high standard of morality which well might serve as patterns in essential ways to the more civilised communities on earth. Nor are the pre-marital relations of the young bloods and their innamorato less influenced by shows of tender feeling than is the case of their sophisticated counterparts inhabiting the West. It is amongst the prettiest sights imaginable to watch the playful courtship of a Nuer youth, and his sweet fancy—a pair of chocolate-coloured statuettes come suddenly to life and frolicking completely unadorned before the world without a sign of shame, because no cause for shame is there. . . .

With the settlement of outstanding claims, or their recording for disposal when opportunity should next arise, the need for further sojourn at headquarters passed away, and I was then confronted with the prospect of a general survey of the district during the months that must elapse before the advent of the rains. This would include the gathering in of tributes; I should also have to see as many “shens” as possible, and make the acquaintance of as many of their chiefs as could be met. Ahead there lay the “Safaria” season.

The population of the Gawair country amounts to probably not more than a few thousand souls, and the territory comprised might roughly be compared to the combined area of Yorks and Lancs. From this cause a D.C. rarely visits each "shen" more than once throughout the season, should he be able even to attain this end, and as the administration of these areas is at present in so crude a state it is not practical to place reliance on the supposition that each "shen" will of its own free will bring in its proper tribute to the government. The due corollary to such a state of things is that the "government" takes tribute when it can, and in this way a D.C.'s visit has for long been coupled in the native's mind with an inevitable loss of cattle—a condition that can hardly serve to strengthen bonds of sympathy between commissioners and people.

For reasons that have been surveyed elsewhere, the question of assessment and demand is very vexed. On the other hand the absence of an effort in that line would merely end in lack of all respect for the administration. The problem must in fact be based on an interpretation of the central policy in regard to all these dwellers on the southern plains. "What is the nature of that policy?" you ask. I say to you, "What do you think should be the attitude adopted towards the human remnants of a savage race, scattered across an area much the same in size as England, and who, to all intents and purposes, are unapproachable for half the year owing to the country where they live being converted by torrential rains into a mighty swamp; who all refuse to work, except for such a purpose as will keep their bodies and their souls together; who have no wants beyond a well-filled stomach and some cattle, no desires beyond a wife, and no impediments beyond a spear?" Unless an air of dignified detachment from the

actualities surrounding the conditions of these people shall have enabled you to formulate proposals for the mutual benefit of certain Englishmen and a supine miscellany of primitives, I would suggest that for the present it behoves a self-appointed government to apply impartially those elementary principles of law and order upon which all well administered communities have in the final instance to depend; to prevent the breaking out of internecine strife as far as possible; to uphold the tenets of the tribal laws, and in a general way to keep the land as quiet as possible for such uncertain time as may elapse before the lords of commerce and the knights of science manage by some means to transform those wild, waste regions into a flourishing and cultivated plain. For it is to the future that we must look, for the future that we must build.

The policy followed, then, in these vast southern territories, is one in which the long arm of the law (represented by an active D.C. and small posses of police) harrying wrong-doers, and the long legs of the government (represented in a similar manner) hurrying over the cracked cotton soil while they may yet carry their burden into acquaintanceship and friendly intercourse with the wild races which that soil supports, form the main features in an administration that in its office-work can scarcely show a sign of life. And in the course of time, encircled by the advancing tide of civilising force to which they are unable and unwilling to adapt themselves, those races will inevitably die, or, through intermarriage with more virile strains, the influence of their blood will finally subside.

Meanwhile, the government's benevolence can be extended only in the form of medical assistance for such folk as seek it, and as has been earlier indicated, both in the administering of vaccine to

the mass, and in hospital attentions to the few, no pains are spared to succour them in all their woes. Nor is the sphere of pastoral activities neglected, for in the event of an insidious outbreak of disease amongst the cattle in a certain district, a veterinary officer is at once despatched to the affected area from Khartoum, to devote assiduous labour in a wide campaign of prophylactic measures. The difficulty that has been experienced in a general effort to assuage the body ills of peoples found in regions far remote from living centres lies in the deep suspicion with which every sign of government authority has been invested for them, and all such spots as Malakal, which they are unacquainted with except perhaps by name, they will avoid at any cost, preferring pain and even possibility of death to undergoing what they fear will prove to be a long captivity. They will be perfectly prepared to enter into converse with a travelling D.C., who has come to visit them in their own haunts, and will even show the greatest friendliness towards him and his rifle-bearing myrmidons, but once let there be suggestion of relinquishing their hovels for a fleeting visit to the distant seats of power, and they recede into the background in a manner eloquent of their true feelings. But since like all the creatures leading natural lives their powers of quick recuperation from external wounds at least are generally sufficient to ensure complete recovery, the casualties arising from their attitude towards a visit to the hospital are probably less numerous than might at first be thought. I remember the case of a Nuer belonging to a certain "Shen Kerfail," inhabiting the northernmost extremity of the Duk. His chief brought him to me when I first passed through the locality and, in my medical innocence, as I gazed on an appalling spear-wound in one of his thighs, I imagined that,

if it had not already done so, gangrene would soon set in, and the man assuredly be joined with his illustrious ancestors. The injury appeared to be deep-seated, and there must have been a gash nearly a foot in length, the weal being quite three inches wide across the centre, leaving exposed a turgid mass of flesh bearing a strong resemblance to a bayonet wound—which is the most unsightly of its kind. The victim did not seem to suffer any great discomfort, although there was a glimpse of dumb appeal within his eyes as one interpreted his words. But despite our efforts to persuade him into going down to Malakal, this he refused to do at any cost, and such poor help as I could give him had of necessity to be confined to an antiseptic bath and a supply of liniment. Under the conditions likely to surround its daily use and the care which periodical renewal would involve, the latter promised to be more a source of harm than good, so that I left him for a man foredoomed. The native custom for the treatment of a wound caused by a spear, an accident, or a wild beast, is always just the same—the laying on of mud to the affected parts, where it will dry and form a covering. As to its efficacy I can hardly speak, except to testify that cases of its use are frequent and presumably fortuitous. Several weeks after the incident just related, I came across the same man in the same neighbourhood, and was amazed to find the injury well on the way towards recovery, and with the flesh now practically healed.

In point of fact these savages attribute to commissioners a skill in medicine which be it said is often not devoid of some foundation, and there is not a doubt that a small medicine chest carried when on trek may be of great assistance in the administration of a people like the Nuers; but above all may the co-operation of a doctor during a tour of districts

be relied upon to profit every one concerned. The situation of a D.C. being appealed to as an instrument of the supreme healing power is not without its humorous side, for not only is it men who look for their salvation at his hands, but women and their babies too. Infants at times are handed up for his inspection—the puking, coughing products of a shapeless motherhood that has no knowledge of the ways of health. Faced with a wasting babe, or one decked out in pocks or hideous boils, what can the sympathetic but untutored layman do but dole it out a dose of Epsom Salts or castor oil. If an afflicted mother steadfastly refuse to journey with her infant to the distant power, the babe must take its chance. The child mortality amongst such shiftless people must be high. . . .

When in the natural ardour following on the conferment of my first magistracy before leaving for Ayod to take charge of my district, I had approached the governor with a query as to the prescribed policy of the government in relation to the “administration” of the Nuers, a smile suffused the features of that worthy individual and he was clearly at a loss to offer an immediate reply. And as he spoke, I gathered that in aiming high I must not look for much, or in attaining little, to cease climbing on towards the heights. I was soon to learn by my experience, to grasp the essential fact that the sole practicable policy lay in the individuality and character of the commissioner concerned—no other being feasible owing to the peculiar conditions that attach to every circumstance surrounding so indefinite a proposition as the administration of a Nuer district.

For my own part, it was not very long before certain principles began to formulate themselves within my mind. It seemed that of all desired

aims likely to see fruition in the future none had such real importance as a far-flung intercourse with all these worthless savages. Above all they must be visited in their "marahs" and their villages at times outside the seasonal collection of their tribute. This must be held a measure to be undertaken even at the expense of losses to the provincial budget, and I resolved to take no cattle from a "shen" whose chief I had not previously met. As matters came to pass this resolution was not always possible, owing especially to the huge area covered by the district and to events that later made my presence necessary in a field quite unexpected at the time, and to which there is a fuller reference in due course. But in maintaining this same principle as a central pivot round which all my activities revolved, I followed a conviction which I had neither reason later to regret nor finally to alter. Without a doubt the chief obstacle to understanding between commissioners in regions of this kind and the tribes dwelling in them lies in the absence of communication, save through interpreters whose honesty and real impartiality may frequently be held in some suspicion, but as already mentioned the uncertain tenure of the former's office and the essential frequency of his translation to entirely different spheres, render his serious study of a local dialect of very questionable advantage, with the result that any Englishman who has command of such a medium quickly devolves into a kind of rarer bird.

Bearing these few premises in his mind, let the reader travel with me fancifully right across the waterless and open plain, grassless now and scorching under cloudless skies. His eyes shall see, but his body shall not feel: he shall pass along the road, but it shall not weary nor the sun appal: he shall

gaze upon the picture, but he shall not know the scene. . . .

Shawish Sabah El Khair was a very excellent and most dependable policeman, so that in leaving him behind in charge I could desert the post without misgivings as to the quiet continuance of its internal life, and having been in sole command throughout the preceding rains, surrounded by the normal population of the Duk, the likelihood of any unforeseen eventually occurring, now that the neighbourhood had been deserted, was quite remote. The "mamur" was at this time backwards and forwards between Ayod and Khor Atar, engaged in forming squads of savages for work upon the road, but our combined attempts in that direction proved only partially successful, chiefly through lack of water, and the innate dislike of manual labour which was always manifested by prospective labourers. In fact, across certain tracts of country work had become impracticable on both these counts, the former disability rendering the presence of the labourers altogether immaterial.

My early days of "safaria" brought me in contact with a useful ally—one whose co-operation with the government seemed to be capable of sane development. Unlike the greater number of the Nuer chiefs whose hold upon their followers is usually of a precarious kind, this individual, having had considerable experience of the ways and means and methods of authority in general and of commissioners in particular, gave every evidence of having definite control over the "shen" of which he was the head. In actual fact, there was some doubt, I subsequently learnt, as to whether this man's leadership was a legitimate affair, but with results showing to such advantage this point was hardly worthy of consideration. In

the days long past when, as a young official, the present governor of the province had been engaged on survey work in the Gaweir district he had had frequent meetings with this chief, and the latter having been of no little service to him, he had invested him with a full measure of authority that he seemed well able to maintain. A tall, well-set-up man, he scorned his fellows' nakedness, appearing always clad in flowing robes; his wives likewise were adorned in finery associated more with the peoples of the north than with the unclad south. I first made his acquaintance at Ayod, whither he had just come down to pay respects to me. His "shen" lived in a widely scattered village known as Khandak, situated in a neighbourhood lying to the north-west of the Duk Ridge. My journey to this place brought me to a park-like forest of talc bush—a neighbourhood that suddenly appeared as an oasis in the dreary plain. Water was still conserved for a few dwellers, but the majority had by now retreated with their cattle to an inland "fula",¹ situated in a deep sector of the Khor Atar lying perhaps a four hours' march from the north end of the Duk, and about six from Khandak. This "fula" furnished a dry season "marah" for the "shen" installed there now, and under normal circumstances it would stay until the rains commenced, and it could seek once more its water-holes and pasturage at Khandak. Very rarely, I heard, did this large sheet of water dry up absolutely, but it so happened that though it lasted on throughout that season a poor rainfall afterwards became responsible for the early termination of supplies the following year. There were about fifty or sixty men working under the direct supervision of the chief during the short period of my stay in the locality, and based as they were on such a splendid waterpoint, with

¹ Fula Gaweir (See map).

their temporary grass shelters and their cattle close at hand, they were well situated for the task.

At about this time I lived in daily expectation of the senior commissioner's arrival; he was a member of the regular civil service whose acquaintance I had slightly made during my previous stay in Malakal. With him there was a doctor, also a permanent official of the service, and these two were undertaking at the time a general visit of inspection to the Lau-Nuer country, accompanied by a body of the mounted police and an extensive "hamla". The main object of this expedition from the point of view of the executive was to collect the annual tribute from a section of the Nuers, dwelling in a region to the north-east of the Gaweir territory who were not for the moment under the direct administration of a commissioner at all, and were accredited with refractory tendencies in general in their relations with the provincial staff, both white and black. From the medical point of view, the chief purpose was to carry out as wide a vaccination as the compass of the tour allowed, and to give as great attention to the ailments of the natives as the deep suspicion of their natures would permit.

As a result of the usual spread of local news amongst such people, word of the whereabouts of my two colleagues came to hand in time enough for me to settle my itinerary so as to meet them at the "fula" just alluded to; and having made that spot, to spend the night under the lone heglig tree that graced the neighbourhood, and find myself at the hub of a duck-shooter's paradise offering a positive embarrassment of sport that gave a splendid bag. Thus I became joined to my companions at about half-past nine the following morning, they having set out from "Shen Kerfail" (at the north end of the Duk) shortly after dawn. Here I made the doctor's

acquaintance; a man of pleasing personality who typified the official hegemony ruling the Sudan. He had the reputation of being a very fine surgeon, but whether such an imputation was justified or not I cannot say. In any event he struck one as a representative of his profession particularly suited to the work with which he was at that time occupied—the sort of man adapted for a life of pioneer investigation in the outposts of the Empire, though he appeared inclined to let himself be somewhat overmuch affected by his sound ideas upon the general subject of preserving health whilst serving in the tropics. In this respect his attitude was largely based upon an outlook influenced by the permanence of his own sojourn in the country, and of the sojourn of the majority for whose health he was responsible, finding it difficult in consequence to see the point of view of those who, like myself, spent periods in the country limited to a brief two or three years' service, and who might with reason be expected to endure more strenuous lives than their less favoured comrades bound to a trying climate for the whole of their careers. For the rest, he was a fine and generous and kind-hearted type of Englishman.

The senior commissioner displayed a bearing strongly in contrast with the calm appearance and behaviour of his friend. I speak, of course, as a result of judgments that I formed over a lengthy period, and after many opportunities of noting traits of character in both these individuals. Excitable to a degree of frenzy almost uncontrolled, forever fearful of the worst, and full of brooding thoughts of thickening plots, the other man was notable in his phenomenal capacity for starting what are known colloquially as "hares". His tendencies in this direction had in fact long since become proverbial

through the province, and doubtless far afield as well. It was in the northern provinces that almost all his service had been passed, as has been generally the case with permanent officials until fairly recently, and he was certainly inclined to look upon conditions in the U.N.P. with the exacting eye of one accustomed to the docketed administration of a settled and more prosperous territory. By the exercise of personal or other influence he had succeeded in serving in a military capacity, during a certain period of the Great War, in the Egyptian sphere of operations, and had thus earned the right to wear three medal ribbons of which he was extremely proud, and, I may add, the governor a trifle jealous, for from the latter's most disparaging remarks upon the subject of officials who had departed in a cloud of petty glory, leaving their colleagues to carry all the burdens of the day upon their shoulders, it was scarce possible to draw conclusions otherwise. But for all his excitability of character, and his susceptibility to various passing influences, this man was no unworthy scion of a governing race. He had been a "double blue" at Oxford, I believe, and now, upon a doubtful side of forty, still retained a muscular activity and a physique that was a credit to his years. Immensely energetic, he would think nothing of a three-hour walk before breakfast, sometimes with gun or rifle, and the incessant machinations of his brain were most remarkable. Influenced by certain leanings towards the work and methods of the Intelligence, he was given on occasion to indulgence in unusual practices, and when these were applied to the apprehension of supposed offenders (notably against the game laws), they became the masterpieces of embodied sleuthdom. As far as my acquaintance with him was concerned I found him both a pleasant and a generous companion, and

I liked him. Later he was made governor of a province in the north.

After the meeting between these two and myself, it was decided I should travel with them for a portion of their way to the Zeraf, and then continue on alone towards the post at Khor Atar, whither I was in any case compelled to journey for the collection of additional supplies. As my companions were now somewhat pressed for time, we did not linger where we were longer than was necessary to avoid the midday heat, and had by nightfall left it far behind. I well remember the expressions of disgust, to which they both gave frequent vent, at the nature of the country over which we passed. They said that it was even worse than that through which they had been travelling for the past three weeks. Execrable certainly it was, but in the heat and burden of an active day one very soon contrived to look upon it with an air of stoical indifference.

The chief bane and major obstacle to easy progress on these dreary plains lies in the clumps of grassy roots that are their natural heritage. I have referred before to the wide-cracked cotton soil, but then these massive, fibrous tufts, often attaining to as much as eighteen inches or two feet in diameter, and standing out above the ground to a height of anything from three to nine inches, constitute an even greater curse to man and beast than do the clefts surrounding them. The existence of these grassy stumps, dotted about within some feet of one another, necessitates the following of a tortuous path, and all the native tracks are sinuous to the point of great absurdity, with the result that every move from place to place is automatically prolonged to an indefinite but most appreciable degree.

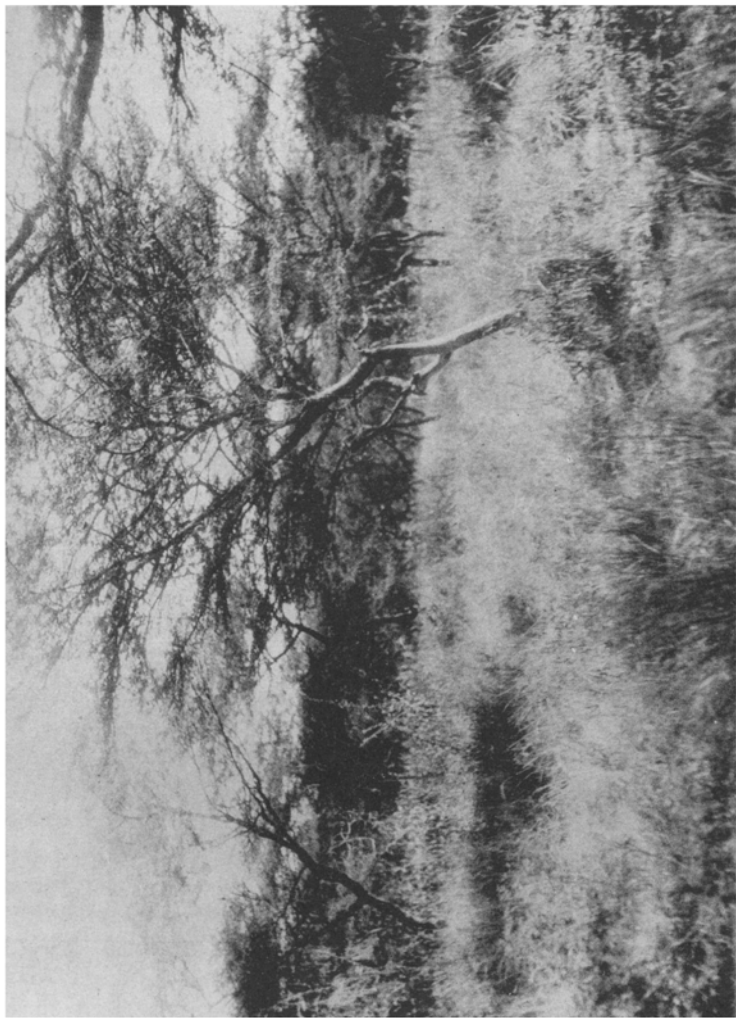
For some long distance as, followed by our "hamlas", we moved on towards a suitable locality

in which to spend the night, no other prospect rose to greet us than the apparently interminable spaces of the wilderness, unbroken save for a few "hegligs", and at infrequent intervals by "kharubs". At no period of our journey were we ever very distant from the Khor Atar, and when we hit at length on one of the main native paths which took a winding course in the direction that we moved, it was at just that point where the Khor bed began to enter woody stretches which continued with some breaks up to its junction with the Nile.

The forest areas in these parts may be associated with a modifying of the natural rigours that attend the unsheltered plains. For not only does the grass become less rank, with a lessening in the bulk and numbers of the root clumps, but the very soil, being more broken up through the combined agency of trees and bush, does not in general lend itself to the formation of the fissures that disrupt the unprotected countryside.

Arrived at a small Dinka village we were directed to a spacious "fula", an inland pond some fifty yards across, and in this neighbourhood we spent the night. As it is always with these rare and thinly spaced dry season waterpoints, this one was crowded over with all kinds of duck and its whole rim was lined with a great gathering of marabout. Two only of this latter species are included in the rights of a game licence, and so I chose the finest looking bird, which being hit rose upwards fifty feet or more above the ground, rocked, and fell suddenly to earth. The lovely feathers which provide the only reason for destroying this ungainly bird are taken in a fan-shaped bunch from underneath the tail, and are not therefore visible in normal circumstance, except the bird be flying overhead.

Towards dusk we were all sitting at our ease in



TALC BUSH.

the enjoyment of that quiet peace which comes with fleeting day, conversing lightly upon subjects of a casual nature, swilling in unison libations of refreshing content, and also contemplating with restrained enthusiasm the prospects of the impending evening meal, of which signs had started to obtrude themselves upon the eyes and nostrils of the assembled three. Lying back dreamily in a Roorkee chair, as the last gilded strands of cloud were on the point of giving up their glory for more sober hues of darkening purple, my wandering gaze lighted upon a small moving mass which at a height of some ten feet from off the ground appeared to be approaching us. On it came apace, and when about twenty yards away a low murmuring sound seemed to steal suddenly upon the air. I drew the attention of my comrades to the phenomenon and they looked up to see a swarm of insects just about to pass above our heads. With one wild cry "My God—bees!" my impetuous colleague hurled himself precipitately from his chair, threw a coat wildly round his head, sprang forward as a man possessed, and dashed headlong under cover of his tent. Before the medico and I had grasped the import of his words, the swarm had passed. My friend now sought again the bosom of his kind, sweating profusely from the exorbitant demands that had been made upon him by a combination of excitement and this sudden physical display, proceeding to expatiate at length upon the dangers of a visitation from a swarm of Sudan bees, and citing items of his own experience in this line. To say that they are insects which deserve respect is no exaggeration of the case. They have instilled into the inhabitants of the land, and into the white man specially, a strong regard for both their presence and their habits that would appear to be completely justified. Although of definitely smaller size than

are their European counterparts, they have a sting of very violent potency, and it is said that the attentions of no great number of them are required to cause the death of an unhappy victim of their rage. I heard later of an incident that bears upon the one above related, the Governor of the province being in my own place and the commissioner of Renk in the position of my shouting colleague. The two were in the neighbourhood of one of the few "jebels" (small mount) which the province boasts, and had become separated in the course of a joint stalk after game. Walking in peace along the foot of the sloping mount the Governor was surprised to hear the crash of stones and undergrowth and a few seconds later to behold the astounding spectacle of his subordinate rushing precipitately down the slope in his direction. Uttering one piercing cry—"Bees!"—the commissioner plunged madly out of sight and his senior had no sooner lain him low and taken cover under an adjacent bush than a fierce swarm of these winged poisoners hummed past him in the form of a dense screen of smoke. It appeared afterwards, when the two had met together in dishevelled harmony, that a nest having been inadvertently disturbed by the incautious and unsuspecting agent of authority, the bees had hurled themselves forth in fury to clear the neighbourhood of all invaders, happily passing by the offender in their ill-directed flight. My own experience of the species is confined to the story told above, and to another occasion when on "safaria" alone—an incident that at the time was marked by a note of strongest caution on the part of all the human principals concerned. It was at the height of the dry season—no water for many a weary mile and the trail a long and winding one. Our little band was taking brief respite from the midday sun, and

under a heglig in the midst of a patch of open bush I was myself sitting on the ground; an empty mug from which I had been drinking lay at my side. The heat was very great as usual—a shimmering mirage rising from the soil and not a breath of air to stir a twig. Suddenly a gentle buzzing turned my attention to the ground close by and I saw a small brown devil clambering over the side of my discarded drinking vessel. As it assumed a settled perch inside, another creature hovered above its mate, and I began to wonder whence the two had come and wherefore hither. An increasing murmur caused me to glance upwards, and I beheld a flight of the invaders speeding from what appeared to be a common source towards the mug. It seemed to me that a retreat was clearly indicated, but before I had come definitely to this decision a swarming mass of bees was circling round the rim. Others were down below it, covering the bottom with their quivering bodies, filling the vessel with a buzzing surge of loathsome insectivity. They had of course descended on this new-found waterpoint sent them by Providence out of due season, and though the likelihood of the strange scene which I was witnessing had not occurred to me before, I did not feel prepared to interfere with the activities of all these uninvited guests. Half an hour later they were still there, and in addition were inflicting their inquiring presence on the neighbourhood of my police, whose anxiety was far from being hidden under the assumption of an air of bravely inspired nonchalance. We had not time enough to linger on the spot until the buzzing host had sapped the final particle of moisture from the vessel they had thus alienated to their use, and it had therefore to be written off our charge; thankful indeed we were that it had served its purpose as a place of

concentration for the invading host. So packing the "hamla" to the strains of a confused buzz, the atmosphere filled with a scattered throng of winged warriors darting incontinently about our ears, we passed on to the accompaniment of receding murmurs, leaving the bees in undisputed sovereignty of their inglorious prize.

I do not know if in the course of his research our doctor man had managed to entrap one of these nasty little things—I doubt it—but if he had not done so then the species must be classed amongst the few types of insects that had escaped the clutches of his net. For the morbid fellow never went or travelled anywhere except he took with him the killing-bottle that served him as a lethal chamber for all kinds of strange and ghastly looking bugs, beetles, and crawling horrors—flies, mosquitos and the hovering creatures of the night as well. In all spare moments he would be examining these things under a microscope or, having first dissected some part of their anatomy, subjecting them to such a detailed scrutiny as to lend to his otherwise benign countenance an aspect of myopic octogenarianism. He seemed to show a great avidity towards the slaughter of "sheroot" flies—ominous looking buzzers abounding everywhere in those foul climes. With a bulk approximately four times that of a well nourished British bluebottle, this kind is given to settling down impartially on man and beast and then inflicting on him such a bite as may be reminiscent of the hearty pinpricks of our schoolboy days. This bite, delivered with an insidiousness to be remarked on in so large an insect, is rendered feasible by the singular absence of vibration imparted to the air throughout its flight. It seems to land upon its victim quite without a sound, and the touch of its legs is so delicate as to be well nigh

imperceptible. Its sting is a most powerful one, but as far as has been ascertained at present gives rise to no injurious after-effects in human beings or in animals. Skilled indeed is he who can swat that fly, for it moves like a speeding arrow, departing as expeditiously as it came.

Along the Khor Atar Reedbuck are to be found in quite large numbers. These beautiful looking antelope are much the same size as the Bushbuck, though their horns are curved and their skin unlined by stripes and splashes of white as in the latter's case. In accordance with the implication of their name they congregate in places where the reeds such as are met with all along the beds of "khors" supply them with surroundings natural to their kind. They are not met with elsewhere in the province, except perhaps during an exceptionally dry season, when they are forced down to the river for water; and being of a very nervous disposition they are more generally first spotted in full flight, unless stalked from a vantage point that gives one access to a herd's known grazing ground.

Moving forward steadily along the track at the head of a "hamla" that, single file, pursues its way across the slight depression, fifty or sixty yards wide, marking the khor-bed now devoid of water, my colleague spies one of these creatures as it dashes off into a mass of tall reeds lying across the path. He makes off quickly to a flank with stealth, and the column halts awhile so as to help him stalk the beast while its attention is engaged on its immediate front. After manoeuvring himself into a suitable position he fires a shot at the creature as it stands looking in our direction, half hidden from view, and it leaps off untouched along the "khor", passing from sight enveloped by the reeds, later to reappear about one hundred and fifty yards from the

head of the column. It comes suddenly to a standstill and I drop on one knee to inflict the knockout blow—to fail miserably, however, for the animal hurtles away unhurt towards the right and thus again is lost to sight. Leaving the others to continue the journey, as they both seem disinclined to pursue the chase further, I make off after the elusive buck into the reeds, and after perhaps two hundred yards of careful progress a sudden billowy movement in the grass ahead of me indicates the presence of a moving creature. Running swiftly forward, I catch a glimpse of a brown mass moving off like lightning through the surrounding green about twenty yards away. This time my eye does not fail, nor my right hand lose its cunning, although in some solicitude for a good head my refusal to allow anyone to tamper with the creature's neck results in the mahommedan prejudices of the police being given free play, and few of their number are later able to enjoy fresh meat in consequence.

According to the tenets of their religion, followers of Islam are forbidden to eat the flesh of any animal that has not been despatched by one of their own number, and its throat cut just before it dies. In order to satisfy this firm injunction amongst peoples frequently in contact with the white man, it has become the custom to conduct the ordained rite as soon as possible after the beast has fallen, and it might well be said in many cases that the required rite has been performed before death has in fact occurred. In out-of-the-way places the strict observance of the law in this respect is not unduly stressed, for the individuals concerned are usually converted tribesmen (of whom many are found both in the army and police), living in small communities remote from any likelihood of wide and general censure, while in a time of prolonged scarcity of meat rarely indeed

would inhibitions rising from this source be allowed to interfere with any opportunity of obtaining it. Absurd as all this may appear at first, its origin is based of course on principles as sound as the religious bans enumerated in the earlier books of the Old Testament, and without the existence of such formal prohibitions the mahommedan races, or such less favoured of their population as inhabit the crowded and insalubrious areas of native towns, would be dying in vastly greater numbers than is the case to-day.

The second night of our companionship fell on a camp set in a forest of talc; there was no water near at hand, but having broken the day's march near a "fula" that still held a large supply despite the drought which held full sway for many a mile around, it had been possible to fill the water skins included in the "hamla" of my colleagues. As the sun commenced the following day to enter on the final stage of its declivity, a small herd of antelope was seen roving not far from the path, and two of us went off separately to try our hands, before the failing light had rendered a further attempt at the chase both barren and ineffectual. I had a small party with me, but these men I left upon the track as much to mark its whereabouts for my own guidance as for a more obvious reason. Half an hour later, having succeeded only in driving my quarry further afield and the sun being now well below the horizon, I returned to the track with the intention of following hurriedly on in rear of the now vanished "hamla." In spite of the number of animals that had already so recently passed along, scarcely a trace remained to indicate their movement owing to the unyielding hardness of the ground, and with dusk falling fast there was little to do but push on vigorously ahead. This we now did until the encircling gloom raised doubts

in my mind as to whether the remainder of the party might not have made a deviation from the path, although it was difficult to conceive of my companions having done this without their leaving a sentry near the point at which they had left the track. Moving on a little further, until it was quite certain that in the normal course of events we must have struck the camp, we retraced our steps along the "high hard", punctuating the desperate passivity of the night with loud-voiced hollaos. It must have been a full half-hour ere I had definitely decided that the prospect of some waterless and mealless hours spent in the palpable obscurity of the open plains would be the likely outcome of our present circumstances. Five minutes afterwards, however, the eyes of an unhappy little band were concentrating on the distant flicker of a murk-cleaving beacon, that sent forth upon the hopeless immutability of the night a note of guidance and good cheer. And so four or five hundred yards away back on our tracks to the left of the native path, I found reunion and my followers peace. Peace, too, came to me later, but not until my colleague and his medical accomplice had been well schooled in the dereliction of those few who take impartial turnings from the common way, leaving another to seek his own provision for the fallen night.

On the morrow we three all parted company; I proceeded with the others for a few short miles, after breakfast setting out with the mounted police and my own men by a route that led to the post at Khor Atar some twenty miles away. The others intended making west to Fangak on the Bahr El Zeraf, whence they would take the steamer back to Malakal.

Quietly onward right through the day, stopping for neither food nor drink; on across seas of stubbly

plain, on through miles of talc offering welcome shade from the fiery orb of day; passing within the forest a herd of giraffe—grotesque creatures that amble ponderously away with galloping gait as soon as careful scrutiny of the advancing host has satisfied them of its identity—emerging once more into a broad stretch of open country that revealed in the far distance, as we covered the weary miles eager for signs of some new feature, the conical roof-tops of more native habitations, and disclosed, with close approach thereto, a far-flung distribution of some Dinka villages. These dotted the countryside at intervals as the route led on along the Khor Atar, crossing it here at one point to pass within the boundaries of a popular settlement, or skirting it at a few yards' distance where not a hut or sign of habitation rose to impress themselves on eyes long since grown weary from the unmitigated glare. And so with the now lowering sun a ball of crimson fire in the western sky, and a faint breeze off the friendly Nile striking both fresh and cool against the slowly closing pores of many a swarthy skin, a thankful band of Britain's far-flung soldiery moves onward yet towards the river bank. . . .

Shades of the African night have fallen now upon the small community at Khor Atar, notably augmented by the force of mounted men who have accompanied my party to within the precincts of the little haven where we rest. The glittering galaxy of silver stars, following their unimagined courses through the heavenly sea, throw faintly gentle light upon this unconsidered corner of the globe, and in the balmy quietude of eventide the rarest zephyrs pass almost unperceived. Void inland of the barest dewy trace, here at the water's edge there is

diffused throughout the atmosphere a cool, refreshing moisture seeming to linger lightly on the river bank and permeate the very being with its delightful fragranciness of rush and water weed, softening the tissues of a sun-taxed body and relaxing all the tension of a weary frame.

I have retired to my grassy quarter, awaiting there the handiwork of culinary minions, and in the dim light of a wax candle encased within its "shamadan"¹ have settled down to my nocturnal studies of the arab tongue. And as I focus on my work an assiduity that comes of frequent practice, body soon yields to mind the energy that lately had possessed it, seeking within the intimacy of a canvas chair the rest that until now had been withheld by the day. . . .

Faintly upon the air there steals the oft-familiar murmur of a paddle wheel—now uncertain, now clearly wafted over hidden waters and the unseen land. Who travels on the approaching boat and whence they come are queries wrapped in mystery, for this can be no post boat—such are far from view—nor are there news of province steamers in the neighbourhood—these are disposed elsewhere. I seek the outer darkness and in the rôle of questing watcher of the night strain eye and ear towards the oncoming mystery. A shower of sparks proclaims a steamer's progress from afar, and as it traces out the tortuous river course, at intervals the lighted decks of a vessel that I do not recognise by night come gradually to view, bringing with them the shadowy outlines of an unknown visitor. A strident challenge strikes across the river, as a lugubrious blast is blown from the steam whistle, and we know this bearer of a human company unheralded would

¹ Special draught-proof candle-holder.

warn us of her intended sojourn near the post. And as all hands prepare to give effective welcome to her, she looms up weirdly in the vicinity of an allotted mooring-place, to come skilfully to rest beside the sloping ramp that leads down gently to the water's edge. Decked in the cummerbunded sprightliness of his immaculate evening garb—white drill offset by a wide band of carmine silk wound round the waist—the spruce and debonair figure of the Governor parades the deck with jaunty air, and the appearance of a man on whom authority sits well. Other figures are to be seen also in the background, but these are seated in deck-chairs, and as the "Sol" goes forth to greet his overlord, I muse on their identity. Summoned, I wander forth in turn to seek their company, am warmly welcomed by the governor, with whom for a short period I discuss affairs of state, and join the ring of human beings who by their advent have infused a civilising light into the darkness of the wilds—brought it in spirit not a whit less than in deed. The governor's lady is on board, and so too are the Egyptian irrigation superintendent and his wife. The last two I have not met previously, and their presence warms the heart of one but lately dwelling on the open plains. Collar and tie, which I have long discarded in the dim and distant past, appear to me incongruous assets in this southern clime, and in the company of my luxurious hosts I feel no weight of shame in that my neck is free from such domestic draperies. No doubt to the assembled sybarites, surrounded by the amenities associated with a comfortable journey on the Nile, the spectacle of this bare-kneed, open-necked ruffian of the outer spaces, the incipience of whose hirsute covering must have been seen in all the unshorn horror of its ten-day growth, could hardly fail to inspire the less courageous of these

startled aesthetes with a feeling similar to that induced by contact with the less aggressive apes, imbuing the remainder with a mild surprise at this strange product of the wilderness.

Apologising for the primitive phenomenon that stands before them now in all its unmasked shame, I sink down happily into the unaccustomed luxury afforded by the spaciousness of the upholstered chair that has been quickly proffered me, giving full vent to an enthusiasm which fairly seems to hold the attention of my listeners and carry them with me onward to the heights, as must be ever so with those who glory in their work. I gaze out, too, upon the unfamiliar beauty of young women, for many a long and unexpectant day unseen by me in the full splendour of their marbled arms. My heart leaps up as I behold the chiselled features of a goddess who in the artful manner of her kind has lowered two sparkling orbs before the unabated onslaught of my ardent glance. So pants the hart, and in the untrammelled coolness of this fragrant femininity I find my stream, drinking therefrom after the passage of these weary, unalleviated days, with all the great refreshment such a source can bring. Joyous the conversation that ensues, and lightsome across the water floats the gay laughter of the sundry five together met under the concerted ægis of Great Bear and Southern Cross. To me explains the Irrigation Bird the deep-laid schemes for Egypt's new prosperity, poring with his companion over a large scale map produced for that one's benefit. I recount some incidents in the execution of my common round and daily task; the Governor, precise and cheerful under the mantle of his authority, relates a few of his own experiences when engaged in former days amidst surroundings such as mine; the modulated, rippling laughter of

young women, secure in these outlandish regions under the moral shield of British sovereignty, falls in sweet harmony on ears that have been long attuned to raucous forest cries; and in the envelope of outer gloom the night is still. . . .

The Irrigation Department's steamer has borne my friends away southwards in the darkness, and at dawn of day I set out once more along the Ayod road, taking with me a quantity of sorely needed stores for personal use. Passing the night at the Dinka settlement that marked the first stage on the road, news was brought early in the following morning by some wandering savages who stated that a herd of "Roan" was close at hand, and so I hurried out to reconnoitre on my own account. Investigation proved the presence of a number of these animals about a half-mile from the outskirts of the village, and I did not find it very difficult to stalk the one I had selected in amongst the scattered patches of the grass where it had strayed. The sun had not yet risen far into the heavens, but through a poor display of marksmanship I failed to more than wound the creature, and was thus forced to follow it across the plain during a space of round about five hours. Fortune in one respect did favour me, however, since the roan followed a line that was at no time very distant from the track towards Ayod, and I was never in any fear of getting lost. One or two policemen came with me upon this chase, and after a ten or twelve mile tracking the creature's hoof-marks brought us right to the outskirts of a talc bush forest, the shade of which was mighty welcome after this hectic rush across the shrivelled plain. During the greater portion of this time the animal had been completely out of sight, but in due course the patient scrutiny of an appointed

“shikari” received reward in the fresh glimpsing of the vigorous beast we sought, which was now browsing unconcernedly outside the limits of the bush. So that at length I could go forward through the forest and recoup myself for all the labours of the day. The hour was now advanced, and by the time the creature had been skinned there scarce remained sufficient light to guide us in our journey back to camp. This, however, we did reach at nightfall, bringing such tidings to the Dinkas hungering for supplies of meat as was the prelude on the morrow following to a vast exodus of villagers seeking a liberal victualling at my expense.

The Roan antelope is certainly a splendid beast, amongst the species with a habitat in the Sudan second alone in size to the Giant Eland, which is encountered solely in the furthest confines of the south, and is not met with in the U.N.P. Having the bulk of a large mule its body is covered with a skin the colour of which, as the name implies, approaches much more closely to a dark blue roan than to a dark brown shade, and may be said to be a mixture of the two. The creature’s splendid crest, on which there stands a heavy mane, sets it apart from its far less conspicuous prototypes, and when observed in profile then the head bears closer likeness to the accepted figure of the unicorn than any other antelope, though the comparison can hardly be extended to its horns, these curving backwards from its forehead in a splendid sweep and reaching to a length of over forty inches at maturity. . . .

Back now within the sheltered precincts of my headquarters where for an idle day, or two perchance—it may be three—I bask away the hottest hours, tramping afoot by dawn and dusk the pleasant spaces that surround the settlement. Here a gentle

Oribi falls to my rifle, assuring for me a head and for the post some fresh-won meat, in which the police will share whole-heartedly. Elsewhere, through the foliage of an evergreen bush I rest upon my knees, watching the pleasing domesticities of a small family of such, gambolling lightly in amidst the grass and grazing off the nearly sapless fibres in a full content, all unaware of the delighted watcher by their side. Or, wandering unconcernedly through prickly bush, rifle on shoulder, seeking the quiet solitude of a park-like countryside, I come suddenly upon a "wee an' timorous beastie"—a Duiker—nibbling the lowest portions of the foliage that covers the bush which screens me from his view. The sandy softness of the soil deadens the sound of my approaching footsteps, and with his head turned half away from my direction, scarce twenty yards divides him from the place where I now stand. I drop down motionless upon a knee and the little beast moves on until not fifteen feet divides it from my rifle's muzzle before the bullet speeds. Instead of falling stricken to the ground, the amazing creature shoots off through the undergrowth with such incredible velocity as to be barely visible, and I cannot conceive how it escaped its doom. But I move forward listlessly, prompted by an innate conviction that my shot cannot have failed to reach its mark, and after walking about ten yards my eyes alight on blood-stains that with the imprint of the little hoof-tracks lead me another twenty or thirty yards ahead to where the animal lies motionless upon the soil. Pierced through the heart the beast had travelled over thirty yards at lightning speed before expiring. Great the vitality of the wild!

Before I move off again into the shadeless spaces, one Gwerkwaw, chief of a small "shen" owning allegiance to Dwal Diu, presents himself to me at

Ayod and I arrange to take him with me on my impending "safaria."

With the past failure of attempts to stimulate the population of the post into producing corn in such sufficient quantities as would ensure their independence of external sources, largely owing to the unsuitable nature of the soil within the district (an excess of sand being detrimental to all growth), responsibility for the upkeep of the annual "dura" store devolved on the commissioner, and as an undertaking of this kind was only possible throughout the drought, it followed that the work entailed needed the formulation of a transport scheme that would not interfere with his pre-occupations.

Arrangements had this year been made at Malakal for the provisionment of Duk Ayod by camel, this having proved the most effective method of conveying the required grain supply for the police force and their families. The road was much too rough for bullock carts, while for mules and donkeys there existed such a great demand through the dry season as not to leave any readily available for this special purpose; the year's requirements in "dura," moreover, would have compelled the employment of too numerous a troop of mules. Camel transport, though an expensive item in these parts, enables the simultaneous movement of large quantities of goods; it is expensive, since the animals must be demanded from the north with their own drivers; they are costly to feed, and a large ratio of deaths may be expected before the termination of the season's work, chiefly from flies, and from the presence of surroundings which the delicate beasts are unaccustomed to. With the beginning of the first early rains a number are most likely to become affected in one way or another, and until the ground has properly recovered from the effects of rain their

employment is not practical at all. They cannot obtain firm footholds on the slippery soil, and in all cases run great risks of injury due to the natural tendency of their feet to make an outward splay, a state of affairs that finds a not uncommon termination in a wretched creature having to be destroyed in consequence of having split its breast in two from such a cause.

During my short stay at headquarters, Khamis Effendi Hilmi, the "mamur", had been beguiling away a few days in the station and had been able to occupy himself with questions of pay and the embodiment of various small accounts for subsequent despatch to Malakal, besides which his presence lent to the place an official tone—and one indeed inclining even towards bureaucracy, conspicuous otherwise by its absence—for around the D.C. there was neither halo of officialdom nor its remotest shade. True to the spirit seeming to imbue all grades of authority in the Sudan with a passion for gardening that is usually in inverse ratio to the facilities available for satisfaction, Khamis was not slow in turning his attention to local horticulture, and having obtained vegetable seeds in great number and variety he had sown representative assortments in splendid profusion all around the central well, and in a plot of ground contiguous to his own abode. In spite of lavish watering only very unimportant crops were ever realised, owing to the impoverished nature of the soil, which as before remarked was chiefly sand. Nevertheless, this profitless endeavour offered an outlet for his ebullient optimism, and provided certain persons in the station with occasional strands of greenish-looking fibre. As well may be imagined, the lack of anti-scurvy elements created a demand for even tasteless and extremely meagre vegetable foods. For myself, a specific appropriation of the

only bearing lemon-tree ensured a plentiful supply of that most excellent, refreshing fruit, and its source was guarded carefully during my long periods of absence by Sabah El Khair, a first-class sergeant of police whom I had early come to look on as my right-hand man. Upon occasion would the honest fellow come to me in casual moments and petition for a solitary lemon on his own account; the invariable success of his requests, usually advanced in close connection with a recent acquisition of fresh meat due to his superior's efforts, did not incline him to increase their frequency, and he was on these occasions wont to seek his "tukl" with a beaming countenance on which were clearly marked the traits of cow-like satisfaction common to his kind.

The vagaries of my impending journey were to take me into the heart of the country lying to the east of the Duk, and though the gathering in of tribute was not the aim I had in view, the claims of sundry litigants were occupying prominent places in my mind, and I intended passing through the various localities in which these opportunists had professed an interest. Accompanying the party was Gwerkwaw, the chief, who numbered himself with those who had a case for settlement, and there were likewise two or three others of his ilk on similar business bent.

Throughout many days of a long and circuitous "safaria" hardly a tree or shrub appeared at all to bring alleviation to the dull monotony of the horizon. This region, converted at the height of the rains into a virtual swamp was now, at the height of the drought, a vast expanse of treeless plain, covered with the usual massive stubble clumps that I have mentioned formerly. In certain areas the neighbourhood for many miles around—as far indeed as eyes could reach, and then beyond to far horizons—

was studded at intervals of fifty yards or so by curious cone-shaped mounds, some seven or eight feet high upon an average and from six to ten feet in diameter at the base, that looked for all the world like giant anthills and imbued the surrounding landscape with a singular and quite unique individuality. These ubiquitous mounds, indicative always of areas under water at the Nile's full flood, are built up by the river animalculæ, and in the dry season, through the districts where their frequency is less insistent, they offer splendid points of vantage for the outpost watchers of the vast Tiang herds that roam and graze across the plain. It is rare indeed to see another species poised in this fashion, but nothing on the other hand is commoner than the sight of one of these animals standing atop a mound and keeping a studious watch across the countryside as guardian of its herd. Frequently you may see three or four of these watchers each so mounted and each facing outwards on a different line, so as to cover the compass points in an intelligent way. In such a circumstance the stalking of a herd becomes a matter of some difficulty, if indeed it does not prove impossible, for to contend against the keenness of these creatures' sight involves the assumption of a task with but small prospects of success. The Tiang is an antelope built along lines that correspond in main essentials with the Roan's; beside which, nevertheless, it must appear to disadvantage from all points of view except the culinary. Notably smaller in its general bulk, it neither stands so high, nor are its horns, which otherwise are similarly shaped, of such a generous size, while it does not possess a mane. Its skin, upon the other hand, is very fine, displaying a rich shade of dark mahogany—somewhat lighter in the female's case, but with great depth of colour in the male. A long, lugubrious

looking head gives it a fully "horse-faced" physiognomy that of course detracts materially from any claims to beauty it might otherwise possess, and in the awkward ambling gait that it assumes in flight the beast provides a spectacle of curious interest to anyone observing it.

Additional features characteristic of this vast wilderness are to be seen in the ubiquity of shallow water-channels intersecting far-flung tracts of country otherwise devoid of any mark of recognition whatsoever. Although these channels might be invested reasonably with the term of "khors," they are essentially so narrow and so lacking depth—often no more than mere depressions in the ground—that they are more akin to ditches than to other natural features of the soil. Some resemble in appearance the less expansive moats of bygone fashioning, and often extend in straight-cut lines across the plain for lengthy distances, giving impressions of a human workmanship that is of course entirely absent in reality. Few of them keep their water after February, but with the Nile's rising flood they fill up rapidly, and as the year progresses overflow, so forming stretches of impassable swamp land. The bottoms of these shallow "khors", covered right over with nutritious grasses that retain some trace of moisture until well on into the middle of the yearly drought, provide good grazing grounds for native cattle, and it is in a countryside of this inhospitable kind that the Nuers pass the opening months of every year.

The "marahs", where the various "shens" are wont to congregate during the time of drought, may well be classed amongst the most desolate of all inhabitable spheres. Set down upon a sweltering wilderness, on which there fall from out the skies by day the scorching rays of sunshine that in this latitude possesses not the attributes of kindly warmth

distinguishing it in northern climes, the grass-made hovels of this barbarous folk rise from the shimmering haze surrounding them like hay sheaves joined in clumps over a new-mown field—a field that except for each small human habitat reaches afar off into the indefinite horizon of the plain. Around the entrance doors of these poor lodgments lie little spaces covered over with a quantity of ash—the sweepings from the fires lit at casual intervals through the day and night, following the whim of someone of each family, perchance to roast the recent fish catch that has this day fallen to his spear or, in the early hours of dusk, to cast a fairy pall of roving smoke-wisps over his humble hearth against the wingéd multitudes that in the gloaming issue forth from watery solitudes upon the evening air. By day, beneath the unemblazoned vault of heaven, the men of such communities roam at the edge of near or distant waters, spearing incessantly amongst the reeds as they move to and fro; or a small band will wander off across the plain behind the herds belonging to the “shen”, leaving at dawn and coming back at eventide, whiling away the day in its entirety by shepherding such herds from grazing ground to water point and limiting the straying animals in their search for provender. The womenfolk, born to the Bible lot of toil and drudgery, pass gentle lives of domesticity within the precincts of their curious domiciles, fetching and carrying water for the household as the spirit moves or needs require, pounding and rolling “dura” into the “kisra” that, with the milk of cows, supplies the natives’ staple article of diet, or nursing fly-plagued tenderlings upon their ill-shaped breasts. As dusk falls, the closely martialled herd of lowing kine moves homeward peacefully across the plain and is conducted by its masters into the picturesque zareba

that provides it with protective shelter for the night. Peat fires burn smokily within the fenced enclosure, and an autumnal pall descends on man and beast. A number of small mud-shaped hovels may be found inside, for the animals are not left unattended through the night, and over everything there falls a quiet serenity, broken alone by gentle, intermittent tinklings from the neck-belled beasts sending quaint harmonies in simple tones upon the balmy air.

At such a "marah" I arrived one day accompanied by a selected posse of police, intending there to pass the brief period of a midday halt before I started off again to a locality in which I meant to spend the night. The "shen" in occupation of this isolated site was still unknown to me, and in pursuance of a normal policy it was my aim to join in converse with both men and women in the hope that I might soon create a happy confidence about the peaceful motives of my mission. Many indeed were the light-hearted conversations upon which I entered with the Nuers, singly and in the mass, during the two-year period of my sojourn in these parts, followed invariably by friendly intercourse between those savages and the police. Ever the invariable salutations, too, the same stressed formulas, the same curriculum of hackneyed jokes that never seemed to lose their pristine call for all the child-like dwellers on those soulless wastes. Schoolboy primitiveness at its earliest stage, reckless laughter uncontrolled, mad shouts of glee sent heavenward in certain witness of a slender intellectualism—such greeted me from swamp and village during the days of far-flung kingship that in those times I justly claimed. Hence not in sorrow nor in anger shall you be forced to bear with me, my readers, in the repeated phrase and simple jest with which I turned to conference amidst the peoples of my

realm. But now observe this simple gathering in the wilds, this sun-swept habitat of a community whose miserable shade I seek at noontide after weary miles on mule-back from a distant camp. Wander in spirit with me on the sun-parched plain, unseen, and glimpsing nothing but the countless leagues of rarely broken solitude that in the wild inhospitality of their great distances weary the body and amaze the soul.

My "hamla", numbering four or five, stands in the healthy perspiration born of steady travel under torrid skies upon the threshold of the "marah", in company with an equal number of police and two strange apparitions who in their journey-stained appointments both look like tattered scarecrows but who must pass respectively for cook and bottle-washer in my domestic sphere. Gatherings of natives, who have observed the approaching cortège from afar, are to be seen engaged in animated talk with one another, seeming to emphasise the discordant sounds that follow on their mouthings by a fierce brandishing of spears and undirected jerkiness. Clearly a note of some uncertainty, of doubt but half suppressed, has come to haunt the minds of all this multitude until by friendly greeting it shall be dispelled. A few aged and bent and haggard men, pitiable in their lean senility, are squatting on the ground in toothless meditation, no doubt ruminating with the same discernment that may be attributed to many an old inhabitant of England's pleasant land. Women of every size and shape and age are to be seen at hovel openings, looking upon the unaccustomed scene with curious interest. Babes, too, in graduated infancy, adorn their mother's nakedness, while clamorous youngsters cluster round in voiceful discord, gathering in boldness as the seconds pass, all yelling stridently before their hearth and home.

As I dismount and go to greet them, some lacking confidence slink unobtrusively towards the rear; one of the women, hapless thing, fearful for her own offspring, clutches the youngest to her breast and runs off miserably, dragging the others after her, to the accompaniment of fiendish howls derived from craven puberty. But now the trembling chief, exhorted by a crowd of robeless warriors, walks slowly forward as I come, and at a few short paces from me raises his hand in welcoming salute, hailing me fearlessly, in the redundant monotonous affected by his breed. I shake his hand. How much more preferable, I muse, this bony, ash-soiled hand, clutching my own with feeble clasp, to many a fat and clammy white man's counterpart? The advancing braves surround me, and the police interpreter comes forward with protective air. Names, roll of wives, and health of cattle; daughters, sons, and his relationship with chiefs well known to me—interminably rolls interrogation's wheel on its appointed course. I essay some elementary, frankly fashioned persiflage which in translation to a cruder tongue seems to retain the whole of its effect, for in the ensuing merriment convulsive laughter dominates the scene. Timorous "starkos", taking encouragement from the success of this encounter, throw off the mantle of anxiety with which the news of my approach had first invested them, and edge up gradually towards the outskirts of the little crowd. Others follow, and I hold court with forty or fifty warriors gathered around me in a circle at my feet. I have seen the old men, the young men, the chief and certain spearless youths; I have also glimpsed the women from afar, where, I now ask, may the young girls be seen (appreciation and sensation all at once)? The people fade away, and before long a bevy of expectant maidens stand facing me in shy

array, clasping each other's hands in girlish sympathy. Fearless, it seems, of any malignant Turk-like attitude that I may have assumed and unabashed by the disparity of their completely natural state with the extravagance of my own covering, they talk to me through my impassive-visaged oracle, across whose bovine features not a ray of ardour even faintly shines, and as I watch this fresh virginity, Venus is not, for Art is king. . . .

Once in the course of my extended "safarias" the malarial curse descended on me in the very centre of the wilderness. It was upon the occasion of my journey with Gwerkwaw and some others of that ilk—the longest unbroken trek that I had undertaken at that time. Five or six days after my departure from Ayod, and having penetrated far into the "khalla",¹ I was immobilised by fever—I say "immobilised", since I became completely incapacitated, not being subject merely to the short-lived bout by which I had been previously afflicted. I succumbed at midday under the fiery canopy of sun and sky—"dam-all" in sight and a good two-day journey from the nearest point of navigation on the river. My camp-bed lay on the open ground near one of the earthy mounds before referred to; the mosquito net had its support on sticks above the bed, and for a space of seven days I hardly stirred from off this simple couch. By the end of the first day my police had built a grass-made shelter overhead that helped to minimise the evils of my lot, and in this rustic home the hours of sickness passed. As for the sufferer's abdomen, it will suffice to say that this was plunged in a state of great confusion at the onset of the malady, so that as long as the visitation lasted liquid alone could be absorbed. By the kind grace of Providence there was a "marah"

¹ Ar. wilderness.

not so far away, and through the offices of Nuer chiefs and the police liberal supplies of milk were brought to me each day. Milk and supplies of that inimitable product Bovril served all my inner needs throughout that week, day in, day out, and when at length I had regained sufficient vigour—strength of a sort came to me suddenly after a good night's rest—the temporary camp, now graced by further shelters for the men, was left behind, and we moved on towards our predetermined tasks, yet lacking, nevertheless, the company of Gwerkwaw and his friends who had proceeded on their several ways after about the third successive day of this unpremeditated halt. During this time no shadow of an impending doom appeared, although I often heard the whispers of the police, "Yemoot, Yemoot" (he dies), imagining the words were spoken in a jesting vein; but looking back in retrospect there came to me a faint surmise that sun and fever strove together in those days to make away with me. . . . After this interlude I found my way at length to the Zeraf where at a numbered "kilo-mark" the province steamer was awaiting my approach, arrangements having been agreed long previously with Malakal that it should be at some fore-mentioned point upon a certain date. This would enable me to ship such tribute cattle as I had collected up to date, and help me also in additional appropriations all along the river banks.

The number of natives settled this year on the Zeraf was very limited. The previous rains had been abnormal in their incidence and the majority of "shens" were to be found inland beside the numerous "khors". It was surprising, nevertheless, with what celerity would bands of savages collect from every side whenever sufficient inducement in the way of meat arose. News, as has

been remarked elsewhere, travels with speed among these folk, and as soon as the word was noised abroad that the "mafettish"¹ was hunting in the neighbourhood, fiercely expectant hordes assembled from the blue to reap such pickings as might come by fate or fortune in their way. It must be borne in mind, of course, that roving spirits may be expected by the water's edge, fishing and hunting on their own, and the geography of the "khalla" seems for them free of all the difficulties the untutored white man might expect to be confronted with amidst the unrelieved monotony of landscape that surrounds. One incident above all others comes to my mind in this connection, at a time when I saw fit to leave the steamer and to shoot a hippopotamus—a shoal of these amphibious monsters being in occupation then of a large area of the waterway. When in the water their destruction is a simple task—one quite devoid of any sporting qualities whatever. Despite the thickness of their massive skulls and paltry volume of their brains, that renders ineffective any ill-directed shooting having for its target the entire head, they have a very vulnerable "Achilles heel", and if a bullet penetrates the ear-hole it will inevitably reach the brain. For anyone to realise this shot effectively the animal must be so placed as to be sideways on towards the rifle, but there is also a position that provides the hunter with a favoured target if it is not so certain as the one above. When facing directly towards him (and this is generally the situation) a levelled bead on one of the creature's nostrils should ensure the bullet strikes the brain, but owing to the somewhat generous bull's-eye offered by that ill-defined component part of its anatomy, a shot directed thus would not invariably strike home. In this event the unfortunate beast

¹ Ar. D.C.

will suffer a nasty wound and sink below the water level, later to pass a miserable life of pain until released by death.

Hippopotami are able to remain submerged for a long time on end. If while themselves in mid-stream they are regarded from a river bank, they disappear from sight, rising from time to time to take a breath of air; if you attend their coming with a gun it must be used with great precision and despatch, for a few seconds will suffice your quarry in its quest for breathing space. Once shot, a "hippo" promptly sinks below, and the body will be out of sight for an uncertain period, three hours, or a half, according to the weight of food it carries in its stomach at the time. A careful watch must be maintained for some way down the stream, because the carcass may appear upon the surface of the water quite a quarter of a mile away from where the animal was killed. Unless carried by the current to a convenient point upon the river bank, recovery of the body will necessitate the help of natives with canoes. They are all adepts in such matters and can be safely left to guide the "hippo" to an indicated point.

At this time one or two barbarians were occupied in the vicinity as mentioned just before, and as soon as one of the beasts had fallen to my rifle, sinking out of sight, their services were commandeered immediately. After the usual lapse of time the carcass came to sight not far away down stream, and two canoes sped after it at once. This happened several hours after my landing from the boat, and since my aim had been associated with a promise to provide all such as cared with generous measure of "garoonty",¹ by the time the bloated monster had been brought to shore a horde of eager savages had come upon the scene. Others were joining them

¹ Nuer, hippopotamus.

in driblets; women brought up the rear of the expectant gathering. By means of tackle taken from the steamer, which was lying near at hand, the forty or fifty braves upon the bank assembled dragged the prize out together from the water, the while I acted as a sort of tug-of-war coach to co-ordinate the efforts of the gang. With the beast resting on a level patch of ground at a short distance from the river's edge, and with the rope removed, an orgy of excitement, until now with difficulty repressed, broke out amongst this mob of wild-faced Nuers, for whom these operations were the prelude to a ghoulisn feast. As for myself, I only sought a quantity of hide and tushes; after that the furies might become unchained, for all I cared. So having warned a few police to marshal all this chattering yelling throng in such a way as not to hinder some initial work upon the carcass of the beast, a small company of braves, who showed no great enthusiasm for the task nor any marked appreciation of the fate that was responsible for their selection, took on the duty of securing all the trophies the commissioner desired. At the end of half an hour's work that undertaking was complete, and the onlookers, who had throughout this time been chafing at the proverbial bit, mentally sharing out the disgusting spoils amongst themselves, surged forth in savage eagerness upon their lifeless prey.

There followed now a scene that I am never likely to forget until my dying day—primitive prejudice and pristine passion running riot, avidity and avarice quite uncontrolled. A struggling mass of naked savages attacked the corpse, cutting it open furiously with spears and tearing at it fiercely with their hands, shouting and yelling and pushing in the inordinate frenzy of their lust for meat. Occasionally a few stood back—but not for long—

thus to allow the severance of a joint by others wielding hatchets furnished for the purpose by police; or there might be an individual, mindful of wife or offspring in the background, who would retire from off his hard-won vantage point, so as for safety's sake to hand them over all the available proceeds of his zealous work. As any left the shifting ranks his place was promptly taken by another, and the gap caused by his retreat filled instantly. The scene was Chicogoan—not a morsel wasted anywhere; hide, meat, fat, stomach lining, innards, gristle and what-not were all accounted for—not a fragment of the hippopotamus that lately was remained to satisfy the shrivelled, questing vultures that soon gathered round. Blood-smeared arms were thrust deep down into the creature's belly up to shoulder-level; they were smirched with grease and bathed in human sweat; foot-holds were gained by feet within its chest in order to enable others the more readily to wrench selected portions of the lungs from their protective walls; butchery, primal and instinctive, gluttony, primordial, held undisputed sway over the actions and the thoughts of all this raging mass. Now and then quarrels would arise concerning certain acquisitions, spears be grasped ominously, and savage against savage rave, mouthing his angry incoherences with venomous intent against the loud asseverations of the other.

This spectacle of nude and atramentous manhood, bathed in its perspiration, and with each one covered down from head to foot in "hippo" blood which was in places clotting on the skin—wild-eyed humans from the treeless-wilds—could but be counted on to stir within a softer breast emotions strangely mixed in their appeal. Laughter would swell my bosom as my eyes surveyed the fringes of the scene, later to be replaced by strong disgust as I beheld the

inner details, while at the last, following alternate sentiments of mirth and loathing, wonder and interest were uppermost within my mind.

Lurking together hopefully and dutifully in the background were the women-folk, quietly amassing all the bloody scraps that came their way—thankful for parts of an abominable entrail, overjoyed at rings of gristle. Police stood close at hand—incipient combatants were warned by castigatory admonitions, and if these seemed without effect, the culprits were removed. On one occasion I was forced myself to enter the arena and disturb the fray, to prevent the bloodshed that had surely otherwise prevailed. By sunset all this field of revelry was almost clear, and as I stood upon the deck of “Shabbyloo” I looked down on the few tumultuous elements that still remained, gathered like vultures round a variety of scattered bones. . . .

A trip on the Zeraf during the month of March offers to one who can avail himself of it many fine opportunities for big-game shooting, since at this time the river banks are the main habitat of animals from far and wide. It is upon the eastern side that the majority of fauna concentrate, and a few hours before the sun has set herds of the different species start to approach the river for their evening drink. The commonest of all game in these parts is the Waterbuck—an ungainly animal with shaggy hair and carrying, should it be a male, a pair of well-curved horns that sweep up backwards in a concave bend for an average length of roughly forty inches. The creature’s lumbering gait, and its appearance, endow it with some small resemblance to the North-land moose, although in size and stature it would cut a sorry figure by the side of that great beast. The female has no horns and looks a thoroughly grotesque and futile animal, with its long, drooping

ears fixed on the ill-proportioned head which nature has assigned to it. Waterbuck rarely leave the river, and are unique in this respect amongst the antelopes—it is their normal haunt, and there they live throughout the year, come rain, come drought.

A lesser known variety of Waterbuck goes by the name of “Mrs. Gray’s”—beside the common kind a smaller beast—found in but two localities upon the upper reaches of the Nile, one of them being within the confines of the U.N.P., the other some way further south. During my service in these parts I came across two separate herds within the province, but as the existence of the second herd was known to no one save a favoured few, and its accustomed grazing ground was situated forty miles or so from the official “pasturage” there is no need to amplify the number of this species’ habitats along the Upper Nile above the two localities claimed for it at Khartoum. The male in size is comparable with a large he-goat, its skin is rich mahogany in colour, dark with a white splash over the back of the neck; finely curved horns embellish one of the most graceful heads of all the Sudan game, and of such game it is perhaps the kind most easily perturbed. At least I can recall to mind the trouble that I had in getting close enough to a selected male for a safe shot, for over open ground the hunter is compelled to place reliance on a sparse diffusion of dried tufts of grass for all the cover that he needs. Such animals, which can be hunted only over ground offering but small concealment in the chase, are to be bagged more easily, if somewhat tardily, by careful observation of the general line they graze along. By moving later into prolongation of this line and lying down, and waiting, there may be endless saving of fatigue even if endless loss of time. In this connection for

myself I must confess to suffering endless weariness, and to the wasting of some weary hours ere I could claim the valued prize: but then I must admit that patience never was amongst my qualities.

Yet another antelope—somewhat less frequent in those parts than is the waterbuck, but more so than the “Mrs. Gray”—receives the designation “White-eared cob,” and being beautiful in form and type deserves remark. Built somewhat larger than the “Mrs. Gray,” but with his horns curved similarly, this stocky little beast has a fine dark brown skin (exceptionally sleek it is) and on its face a splash of white bedecks the muzzle. But the main features that distinguish it, as may be gathered from the name by which it is more popularly known, are to be found in the conspicuous ears of white that mark its aspect, rendering it visible in the bush and in the grass with which it otherwise might freely blend. It is essentially a dweller in the bush, and does not seem to wander very far from river areas, though it does not remain tied down to these localities, nor yet the river banks, to anything like the same extent as does the Waterbuck. I have one very vivid recollection of a chase after a White-eared cob that, wounded, had escaped from me across some open country into a large talc-forest. Heavens above, what distances did we not cover, miles from the river bank, under the broiling sun! A bolt for three or four hundred yards, or even more, and then the creature would be lost to sight. Then of a sudden I would come upon it in the bush, and ere I fired it would be out of view again, hidden behind a maze of narrow trunks and spiky undergrowth. But after several hours its strength at last became exhausted, and when its tracks eventually led me to a patch beneath a tree where it had sunk upon the ground, it had made no effort to

escape, and I was thankful I could give it peace at last.

Much can be said for the opinion of a certain veterinary officer to the effect that, could he order the conditions under which game licenses were issued to prospective hunters, one of the first considerations for the grant of such would be a demonstration of their prowess with a rifle. As matters stand, and are indeed so likely to remain, how many wretched animals are wounded and escape into the bush, either to suffer there a lingering death, or fall a ready victim, mercifully perhaps, to one of those fierce beasts of prey in which the land abounds. . . .

The sultriness that just precedes the breaking of the drought, and the oppressive atmosphere that heralds in with no uncertain note the first few showers of rain over a countryside dried up as by a fiery furnace through the past four months or so, had settled on the reaches of the Upper Nile as I once found myself again at Malakal. The heat was formidable—a hundred and ten degrees at midday in the shade—and the air was stifling. On the front I met the Governor, who with my tall, pale colleague had come down to make inquiries after a sick employee of the cotton company working in the province. The luckless man was suffering from a bad attack of fever, and was reported in a critical condition. “Hope to goodness he doesn’t die,” exclaimed the Governor, who did not look with favour on the future prospect of assuming fresh responsibilities arising from activities that might include the supervision of embalming rites. Such premonitions as perhaps affected him, however, at the time, did not attain fruition in reality, and the afflicted man recovered soon, joining eventually the ranks of permanent officials of the Government, being selected also to succeed me at Ayod at the conclusion of my

tour. Percy (thus had his doting parents named him) was a most jovial, hearty soul. His father, an Italian, had long been settled on the West Moroccan coast; his mother, who was English, seemed to have given her son a good preponderance of British qualities, despite the swarthyness that marked the colour of his skin. There was about him something of the romantic figure always associated with the tales of pirate days, for though he did not lack an arm, nor carry a cutlass, the coloured shade he wore to hide an empty socket gave him an aspect somewhat sinister. Wounded in the war, he had adventured into the Sudan in the employment of the cotton growing enterprise that had commenced its labours in the U.N.P., and which proved afterwards to be his happy means of access to a profession normally entered through a very different channel. Percy possessed, too, an engaging sense of humour—hence the appeal that my paternal methods of administration had for him. Long did he laugh, and loud, in his appreciation of the Ayod case-book, as have some others, maybe, in the interim. But let us now dismiss this individual to oblivion for a while, as we envisage down at Malakal the gradual waning of the drought, and the commencement of the rains.

As in the case of former visits, the P.E.'s roof provided me with shelter, but in a few days fever had assailed me once again, and as a consequence the medico, who was referred to previously as a bug enthusiast, shattered my dreams of leave in Kenya Colony which it was now ordained should pass in temperate climes.

My stay at province headquarters was not of long duration. There was a trip along the Nile taken together with the medico up to the borders of Lake No, during the course of which some tribute

was collected and vaccine administered in various places to those applicants requiring it, but save at a point referred to as the "Sudd Factory," there was a dearth of patients everywhere. Within this neighbourhood there stood the site of some disused buildings that had once formed a works constructed with a view to manufacturing bricks of fuel from the enormous quantities of rush-grass covering the edges of the river, and a wide area that extends inland across these regional swamps. This vast expanse of vegetation is the "Sudd", and it had been intended to compress the rank and wasted growth into conveniently sized blocks of fuel for steamer use, and with a view to export later on. The scheme soon definitely failed, but the imposing factory, now shorn of everything that could be economically removed, remained a witness to the passing of an ingenious enterprise. A native caretaker, on whom a diverse family connection no doubt battered suitably, had been installed in occupation of the place, and did not show displeasure at our visit, before the end of which a host of queer, insanitary folk, whose hold on life can but have been precarious, had flocked towards the river from outlying neighbourhoods, seeking the mitigation of their ills. It is at this point that the Nile converges from the wide expanse of water named Lake No. Few more completely dreary river reaches than this so-called lake can well exist, with its dull, muddy, sluggish waters seeming to hardly move at all, and the unchanging vista of its rush-fringed edges stretching in reed-like lines towards an unalleviated horizon of perpetual grass. There is some fishing to be had within the limits of this watery waste, and sundry sportsmen from Khartoum were so engaged as we steamed on a short way into it before returning down stream back to Malakal.

The first rains had broken, and clouds would gather now and then, to concentrate in heavy showers or disperse themselves under climatic influences that were unfavourable to their development. The localisation of these early preludes to the storms of wider incidence and visitation that later scourge the countryside with deluges of lashing rain becomes the source of many a pleasing landscape scene, when in the sunlit distance may be observed at well-spaced intervals on every side the isolated forms of scurrying tempest clouds, driven ahead by winds that move them on in whirling eddies, only to pass from sight in slowly fading mists or be discharged in wavy streaks of rain, descending on the earth in vaporous screen-like forms, and splashing natural brush-marks from the sky towards the clearly limned horizon of the plain.

The suddenness with which these storms appear renders a "safaria" at this season of the year a thing of hazard viewed from the standpoint of the venturer's comfort, for the intensity of tropic down-pours cannot be gauged from the experiences of storms in softer climes, and even a short incursion in the bush beneath a cloudless sky may be fraught later on with most depressing consequences. Such a predicament faced me close to Tonga, when I had left the boat to follow a herd of Tiang that had been seen a short way from the river bank, for being enticed afield in ardour of the chase I was caught later in the open under blinding sheets of rain that soon imbued my scanty raiment with the appearances traditional to bathing garb. To one based on a steamer, the effects of any incident of such a kind may soon be neutralised by a resort to the amenities that form a part of it, but should he be on trek the situation can assume a singularly bleak and devastating character.

Immediately on our return to Malakal I made some hasty preparations for a final journey to Ayod, which there was need to visit with a view to the perfection of arrangements that concerned the small detachment of police who would remain in occupation through the next six months. During the course of the three weeks following I had some rich experiences of what the gods of storm can do—the first of which, under the guise of a “hubboob”¹ accompanied by a colossal deluge, placed the existence of some thirty souls in direful jeopardy. I was travelling back to Khor Atar in the province steamer which, in addition to its normal crew and some police, was also carrying a little company of natives back to various destinations. The hour was well advanced, for I had turned in for the night, listening in dreamy fashion to the rhythmic churning of the stern-wheel, when the faint, ominously persistent rush of wind that presages the approach of that insidious danger to flat-bottomed river craft—the “hubboob”—a tempestuous visitation of the elements which, observable by day from far away, comes on the incautious in the night with all the subtlety of a wandering thief. My own acquaintance with such things had up till then been limited to hearsay: I had heard of steamers foundering in mid-Nile, of many drowned; I had seen the graves of British officers, both victims of a similar tragedy; but I had given small account to the reality which, as the future had to show, was to confront me shortly in the intensive vividness of fierce experience. A gentle rain was falling at the time and the night’s peace reigned over all, but as the first light rush of wind assailed the steamer cries of “Hubboob!” rose from below the decks, and I discerned the boat was being steered towards the bank. Rain started

¹ Ar. windstorm.

to descend with added force and the wind freshened. But there had not been time to reach the shelter of the bank before a terrific blast had buffeted the vessel's side and made it take a heavy lurch, from which it was unable to recover, due to the force of impact of the wind, which howled with unimaginable fury, whistling and shrieking through the cabin's crevices and making such an elemental din as never had before nor has since struck upon my ears. Faintly, and in staccato notes beneath the fury of the sudden tempest, the rallying cries of stout-lunged individuals proclaimed themselves, and as all motion seemed to have left the vessel now, and water poured incessantly into the little cabin, I deemed it wise to take my stand outside on deck and face the possible eventualities that might arise. I pushed the door and it was hurled right back upon its aged hinges firm against the outer cabin wall. A sustained and furious blast trumpeted with vigour on the threshold, and as I passed across it I was carried willy-nilly to the deck-rail. Within five seconds I was drenched, my pyjamas now a mangled mass of saturated rags. There was no doubt that owing to the steamer's list only its attachment to the travelling barge had saved it from capsizing. Even now, with one side pressed against a shallow section of the river bed, above which it was possible to see the clusters of up-growing reeds, the general situation was precarious and a strong gang of rain-drenched men were pulling in directed unison upon the ropes that joined the steamer to its barge. Across the raging blast there came the exhortations of the crew to one another; these settled down into the steady rhythm of Islamic supplication as they hauled upon the various tackles they were manning at the time: "Ay—yallah—ay—yallah—ay—yallah . . ." moaned forth in dreary repetition from the lower

deck and punctuated sometimes by the ejaculations of the arab "räiss", fell without ceasing on my ears, and as I gazed into the opacity of raging night the infernal aspect of the picture was impressed indelibly upon my mind. The groans of straining timbers kept up continuous assault upon the hearing, and with the roar of wind-swept torrents dashed from on high upon the old zinc roofs of barge and steamer added a dreadful discord of metallic resonance to the sepulchral reverberations of the storm. Suddenly, in a like fashion as it first had struck, the tempest passed. What could appear now only in the light of deathly calm after the ten preceding minutes' visitation by the massed legions of the underworld, had in the twinkling of an eye surrounded us, and an uncanny stillness was imparted to the damp night air. So passes the "hubboob"

On the day after this occurrence my small party landed at the Khor Atar police post, there to find the camel drivers making their preparations for the final journey to Ayod, and on the morrow we set out together for the Dinka village at the end of the first stage along the route.

In accordance with the wish expressed, since I preferred to sleep beneath the stars than seek the shelter of a native hut likely to harbour parasites of a revolting kind, my camp-bed was set out beneath the unclouded firmament that shone in brilliant augury for the untrammelled peace of coming night, and in due course I had surrendered to a deep forgetfulness between the folds of my valise. But during the ensuing hours the heavens' face became obscured, and in the early morning I was wakened by the gentle fall of rain that was continued with a soft persistency until long after day had come. There was but little to be gained in the forsaking of a sodden couch for the diluted benefits of some

dirty "tukl", while the bleak prospect of my floundering round in night attire across a slippery quagmire just as a prelude to achieving such a change, kept me irresolute until the idea receded further in the background, and the inhospitality of the surrounding gloom confined me definitely to my bed with an unhappy fatalism. Water streamed in upon the hypothetical imperviousness of my valise, and long ere the first faint signs of daylight had relieved the gloom of night I lay in sloppy misery within a sodden mass of erstwhile fleeciness that every time responded to my slightest movement with a reminder of my clammy, parlous state. A small pool had collected in the centre of the bed after an hour or so of its enforced exposure to the elements, and this had forced me to take up a curious posture of discomfort at its edge, until a stir among the sleeping myrmidons, which coincided with the break of day, enabled me to put in hand the necessary operations for my own relief. An astounded henchman made his approach towards the strangely huddled form of his beleaguered master and, after making all the domiciliary arrangements that were possible, set about extricating me from the damp confines of my flooded prison. "Allah!" he said in tones of great amazement, as he examined the bedraggled covering that I had just emerged from, "all is water"—a most inconsequential platitude having in view the pailful that was then, with every movement of its enfolding fabric walls, seeking new levels and fresh outlets to a wider sphere of unrestrained diffusion. The rain that had been falling for some six or seven hours ceased now at last to harry the small party it had caught in such a state of unpreparedness owing to their leader's will for light and speedy travel, but by this time the ground was temporarily impassable, so that all thoughts of further progress on

230 A NOMAD IN THE SOUTH SUDAN

that day had to be unconditionally abandoned. Later the sun burst forth in all the accustomed glory of his might, and clouds rolled by, leaving a little band of hopeful men to focus their activities upon the surrender of their kit to the benign influence of a dazzling sky, and to continue their interrupted progress to Ayod upon the following day.

CHAPTER X

A MISSION FROM KHARTOUM

Arriving in Khartoum after a short leave spent mainly in Cyprus, I found myself appointed for a period to an office desk, becoming deputy-assistant bottlewasher to the Civil Secretary—a task unpleasing to me, being fraught with all the irksome calls of social life for which I felt no inclination at that time. Not many days had passed, however, when from the Fung Province in the Blue Nile zone came a request for a commissioner's despatch on temporary duty as a tax-assessor. It is by no means an unusual circumstance for understaffed provincial governments to be compelled to seek assistance from outside during the busy seasons of the year, and as a chance of visiting that region was not too lightly to be laid aside, I lost no time in volunteering for the work. As a prelude to departure, greatness was thrust upon me unawares by my involuntary creation of a local record, which there is reason to believe has not yet been surpassed. The arrangements for my journey south to Singa, the capital of Fung, included train to Sennar where the railway line parts company with the Nile and turns off west to Kosti. By some remarkable concatenation of affairs that dogged my ways on the intended day of travel, I missed the train from Khartoum and was thereby forced to wait three days for a connection. Such an event had never been known to happen before in the Sudan; the idea indeed was far too fanciful for contemplation. The

232 A NOMAD IN THE SOUTH SUDAN

C.S. was almost dumb on learning of this most remarkable occurrence. "This will be splendid news for 'M'"¹ he said, "he'll be awfully pleased; people usually arrange to be on the platform about an hour and a half before the train is due to start." Railway travelling in the Sudan is such an event amongst officials and the natives, and the journeys so infrequent, that the occasion almost seems to reach the status of a rite. Hence my fame.

It is a naturally arid countryside through which the Blue Nile flows between Khartoum and Sennar, the average rainfall being unimportant, but with completion of the dam at Makwar, lying a few miles from the latter place, a large area of land known generally as the Gezira has been devoted to intensive cotton culture; and since this area is being constantly increased it should not now be long before the entire district has been fully irrigated.

I spent a night at Sennar in one of the local guest-houses—a well-built structure of a kind not common in the southern provinces, being motored over on the following day to view the settlement that had arisen in connection with the dam, which at that time had not then been completed. This settlement struck quite an unaccustomed note amidst the barren countryside—a centre of industrialism that if only of a temporary kind seemed none the less incongruous in the surrounding plain. At night a blaze of garish light provided by a row of carbon lamps lit a wide central avenue along both sides of which there lay the bungalows of company officials occupied with the construction. The labourers employed were naturally Sudanese, but overseers seemed for the most part to have come from European sources, and consisted chiefly of Italians, Greeks and British. No doubt the maintenance require-

¹ Director of Railways and Steamers dept.

ments of the dam have now resulted in the permanence and growth of Makwar.

From Sennar, an important native town without particular distinction, I travelled in a motor-car along a straight earth road until I reached a pre-appointed spot upon the Nile, transferring there into another vehicle that took me on to Singa. The landscape's character shows signs of gradual change once Sennar has been left behind, the frequency of talc and other trees increasing as the miles are passed. The flatness of the plain near Sennar changes to slightly undulating countryside, and an increasing vegetation is responsible for lessening dreariness of scene. There is a well-marked contrast to be seen when one compares the river banks of Blue Nile with the White, and this is mainly due to the greater force of current when the former is in flood. The effect of it has been to cause considerable erosion, and all along the Blue Nile's course the undermining action of the yearly rush of waters is to be clearly seen, especially at river bends, though not by any means confined to such localities. From various causes, a degree of picturesqueness is associated with the lesser stream that seems most definitely lacking in the other's case. It is attributable mainly to the preponderance of forest areas on the former's banks, for with the exception of the neighbourhood of Renk, stretches of forest on the greater stream are few and far between, and patches of bush provide the sole relief from all the sad monotony of giant grass that fills the plain. There is, however, no such note of wildness on the Blue as marks the region of the Upper Nile, since the first's territory has long been settled and is frequented by some arab tribes living in villages at intervals along the river course, or based upon the larger "khors" that are connected with it.

During the time of flood there is a steamer service serving Sennar and Roseires, which last place represents the navigation limit, but at other times the river is too low for exploitation save by arab dhows and by "felukas".

Singa is far from unattractive as a province headquarters, and by reason of its situation may be considered as a notable advance on Malakal, though this could only be expected having in view the former's earlier establishment, and the resources of the neighbourhood in which it lies. The arab town is some way distant from the quarter where the European residences are found, and the intervening space is filled with avenues and scattered trees. Houses of officials, and the local offices, have been constructed upon more pretentious lines than have their counterparts in Malakal, and the river frontage has at least a greater range of outlook if not greater length.

The hospitality of the Deputy-Governor was accorded me during the first days after my arrival, and it might well be called a generous one. The house was furnished in a style or luxury not common in those parts, and it exhaled a sybaritic air that gave a powerful note of permanence and ease. This was the home of a well entrenched bachelor—a man entirely unprepared to render up his creature comforts for the questionable advantages of feminine society. Indeed so definite a hold had such a resolution got upon him that he expressed a querulous astonishment at others similarly placed who could afford to keep a wife. Later, I was accommodated in the bachelor's mess—a building made for three or four, and this I shared with a commissioner and a veterinary officer attached to the provincial staff, who both of them were excellent companions. The former proved himself to be an erudite performer

in the arab tongue, in spite of a comparatively short period spent in the Sudan. His talent even went as far as arab verse—a rare enough attainment with the natural users of that tongue to make no reference to an Englishman. Prior to my departure he presented me with an oracular address, composed of lines of high poetical ambition that would have pleased the most instructed of Mahommedans, and in their scholarship were far beyond my own ability.

With him I undertook a short preparatory trip in order to obtain a rough idea of the conditions ruling in these parts, and we set out together on a journey westward of the river, accompanied by some police and a small camel train. In this locality, as elsewhere, camels are used for riding and for transport purposes, but donkeys are more commonly employed amongst the Arabs in their shorter travels to and fro.

In this latitude the country lying between the two Niles is a wide grassy plain with tracts of bush, for the great forests bordering on the Blue Nile do not extend for very far into the interior west of Singa. A sparse rainfall is sufficient for the cultivation of the native "dura," and this is often found in isolated plots upon the open plain remote from any signs of habitation, during a trek across these parts, which correspond with country north and east of Renk. Yearly assessment of the corn yields is the task of specially appointed courts of travelling Arabs, composed of notables recruited from another district so as to form a quite impartial tribunal. All individuals so assessed may make an appeal to the commissioner, but it is very rare indeed for any man to have recourse to him—a fact that justly signifies the equitable nature of the work performed. The members of these boards are men of standing,

236 A NOMAD IN THE SOUTH SUDAN

such as "omdas"¹ and sheikhs, and as they hold their office permanently they have developed a proficiency in carrying out their task which seems extraordinary to the uninitiated. A leisured survey of the standing corn in any plot and they can estimate its yield reliably, and the results are probably more accurate than those obtained through the methodical essays of men to whom experience in this kind of work has not yet been vouchsafed.

After two or three days together I and my companion parted company, he to undertake some duties in the neighbourhood that we had reached, and I to move on further westward to a spot called Jebel Dali, which is an isolated monticle about four hundred feet in height protruding like a giant pimple from the level plain. At the foot of this great rock there stands an arab village of a certain size, the people living in it being a pastoral folk with herds in the vicinity. A spacious patch of "kittur" bush extends towards the south from near the Jebel's base—scrub of a particularly thorny kind that once encountered is not likely to be forgotten—but from a point of vantage on the rocky pinnacle, as you look down upon the plain that stretches out in all directions to a circular horizon, nothing is there except this forest, and a very distant peak or two resembling that on which you stand, to interrupt the vast expanse of haze and mirage filling all the field of view. The neighbourhoods of certain isolated features of this kind are not without attraction, and during "safaria" they provide convenient halting points where milk and water are obtainable, and so they have the semblance and associations of oases in the plain. This term, indeed, might not unjustly be ascribed to them, for wells alone make such localities inhabitable.

¹ Heads of a tribe.

Although the region harbours numerous Ariel¹ it is near the Jebel that the greater number are at present to be found, and in those days a large herd had for a long time been established just a mile or so away, attracted quite as much by the plantations of the natives as by the existence of a stretch of tender grass that grows in the vicinity. With nothing but the meagre cover furnished by some scattered bushes, the stalking of this herd required the most persistent patience and the adoption of contortions by the prostrate form that are at once the bane and common lot of every hunter of the wild. Such antics do not tend to peace of body or of mind, nor yet conduce to an effective range of vision, and as I watched the approaching herd it was to find myself surprised upon a sudden by an individual forager that had meandered almost to the muzzle of my rifle from a direction unforeseen. Within some seconds of the creature falling to my shot, the herd was racing off across the plain like greyhounds, and creating as it went a cloud of dust and thud of hoofs that might without exaggeration have been taken for a flight of mustangs.

Soon after my return from Jebel Dali, I made off south along the Blue Nile's western bank with a couple of mounted police and one of the tax-assessment boards. It was a somewhat miscellaneous cavalcade that set off in the early hours of a dawning day upon this visitation of the districts by the riverside—the commissioner, short-panted, mounted upon a serviceable horse that an accommodating government provided; the two minions of the law seated on their own camels, decked out in the conspicuous finery of their caste; a spectacularly loaded trio of yet other beasts, covered in the promiscuous panoply of couch and kitchen; the

¹ Sommering's gazelle.

rear brought up by bearded, prosperous-looking Arabs riding on those diminutive mokes that may be said to mark a universal feature of the East.

The greater part of the assessment on the river bank had been completed, and there now remained for the attention of my little band some southern areas on the other bank, and so for a space of several days we travelled on across the wooded belt along the riverside, passing the night at centres lying near our path as sunset fell. A fairly numerous population dwells in these regions, and the villages have large communities of arab settlers. South from Singa fifty miles we crossed the Nile by ferry, which was a primitive oar-manned barge that took the entire party of men and animals across the river in a single trip. The water is very low at this time of the year, and on one side of the river the banks slope down towards a beach of sand that has considerable extent. On the far side, the course of the journey south is marked by a thickening of the forest belt, the density of which increases all the way towards Roseires. The Khor Agalin follows a bed that lies approximately parallel to the main river in this region, and a few villages are found inland along its side, although these areas are still largely unexplored at any distance from the Nile. Moved by the spirit to attain this "khor", I ventured out into the forest one fine day, but after travelling steadily till nearly nightfall through thick talc and other trees was forced to pitch my camp within a timbered region that presented absolutely not a vestige of a landmark, not a sign of water and not a single one of life, being compelled to seek the river once again at dawn along the tracks of the preceding day. Returning later north, I came on one of the local "mamurs" who was occupied upon a task that coincided with my own, and as he knew a great

deal more about the work than I could do, he being naturally well versed in the geography of the locality and personally acquainted with its leading men, I handed over to him the completion of the assessment on the eastern bank, travelling north-east myself along a path that led to certain villages whose situation on the Khor was not in any doubt. Some twenty-five miles distant from the river, right along this path, there lies a point of arab settlement known as Abu Sa'id. The "tukl" homes are rather widely scattered and they lie in a comparatively open clearing in the forest. The Khor Agalin is situated close at hand, and at that season (early in November) still holds a quantity of water which, however, does not reach far south beyond the neighbourhood. Within a little distance of the village, the "khor" is widened out into a sheet of water and so forms a pond three or four hundred yards in length and perhaps two hundred wide, its edges lined by weeds and rushes that at this time of year afford good shelter from the sun and a completely natural haunt for numerous duck of various kinds. In the evening all the birds were wont to settle on the surface of the water, quite regardless of their human visitors, but on a stone being thrown amongst them they ascended in such multitudes as to provide the finest sport that with a shot-gun it has ever been my fortune to command. As they circled this sheet of water the air was filled with whirring coveys, but after some minutes of excitement they never failed to settle yet again upon another corner of the pool. There must have been full many a hundred birds in these astounding flights.

After my arrival in the place, news had come through for me anent the inroads of a band of elephants into the locality, how their visits had

been intermittent, and what damage they had caused by night to the plantations in the neighbourhood. These elephantine foragings are common incidents in wilder regions at the period of the year when native corn is ripening, and offer anyone a very ready means of tracking down the animals, should he desire to take advantage of the opportunity. In point of fact a feeding ground was freely stated to exist not very far away; a kind of rallying centre for the adults and a nursery for the young. To this locality I soon decided I must make my way, and so, though having no great confidence that the expenditure of energy involved would meet with adequate reward, but fortunate enough in the experience of a local arab shikari, I started out with "hamla" much reduced at the first blush of dawn, two days after my arrival at Abu Sa'id. The party had not left the village more than half an hour when we came suddenly upon the recent droppings of an elephant, which my shikari thought had marked the passage of an animal about a day before. It was immediately decided to renounce our destination, and to seek the trail that clearly lay ahead of us. We had not moved much further on along the native pathway which the beast apparently had followed, when other signs appeared for our encouragement and clearly indicating that a herd had very lately passed that way. Branches that had impeded their advance had been torn down from tree trunks and lay on either hand as we proceeded, while here and there the imprints of their feet were visible upon the grass that bordered it. Their tracks became diverted from the path ere we had travelled very far, and soon became much clearer—a well-marked furrow cutting through the forest's sun-parched grass that fire had not yet claimed. About an hour after sunrise further traces

were vouchsafed to us—first a large space of trampled undergrowth was passed; this obviously had served the creatures for a bed during some very recent period, and as we travelled hastily ahead the trail became insistent in the signs that it was newly made. Never at all was there occasion for a doubt; with every added mile the tale of those that had but lately passed was now unfolded with increasing emphasis. We had set out from Abu Sa'id at about five a.m., and having trekked without a break throughout the morning, were rewarded after about six hours of undismayed tenacity by finding that the pinnacles of dung strewn intermittently along the trail were definitely warm. It therefore seemed to us that we should come upon the herd as they were taking their siesta under trees according to their usual custom, and this, in fact, was soon to prove the case. At the end of yet another hour's trek, my shikari, now twenty or thirty yards in front, showed signs of great excitement suddenly and then stepped back to whisper with alarming audibility, "Feel! feel!"¹ I dismounted hurriedly, removed my rifle² from its case and went ahead in the expectant eagerness of one who for the first time is to face an elephant. The forest at this point was thick and closely spaced with talc, a shimmering haze was rising from the ground, and it was quite impossible to see much further than some sixty yards at any point. My arab guide came with me for a little way, and as soon as he was able pointed with outstretched arm to our left front. I could at first see nothing but the narrow trunks of many trees, their overhanging foliage pierced by the shafts of light that filtered from the sky. But as I stood in silence, straining my eyes in the direction that he indicated, a huge grey mass loomed into view and then lurched forward

¹ Ar. elephant.

² .450 D. B. Express.

with a ponderous movement that revealed the outlines of an elephant. Others appeared, following their leaders slowly and deliberately in single file—creatures that seemed at this close range and in their true environment to have the size of houses, and lumbering through the irregular forest screen with an impressive majesty of progress that for a moment fascinated me and held me motionless. Leaving my party behind I went forward a short distance, keeping along a line that paralleled the movement of the herd, although this only meant my walking on a few more yards, because the leader by some curious chance decided at that very time to take position underneath a tall and spreading heglig, doubtless to pass the hottest hours of the day there dozing in the shade. He moved on in the same direction until just beneath this tree, and then he stopped, changing neither his position nor his posture, and with his loosely carried trunk depending vertically, his body motionless except for the occasional waving of his ears, which in their outline and their rich-veined contouring looked like a pair of giant leaves rising and falling gently on the wind. As the creature stood there it was clear that he was certainly the bull, because his tusks, though fairly small like those of other Blue Nile elephants, were most conspicuously larger than the tusks of the remainder of the herd, which was composed of four more cows. These came slowly forward, swinging their trunks and breaking off an odd branch here and there, did it obstruct their path or fancy so incline them, and then moving up beside the leader's further flank so that the latter was between them and myself. Then they faced outward at right angles to his body, and so, bunched up in an uneven row, their tails towards me, they assumed a pose of similar tranquillity to that adopted

by the bull. I moved forward cautiously under the cover of sundry bush and an occasional clump of grass until within about thirty yards of the heglig under which the quarry sought protection from the midday sun. Such gentle waftings of the breeze as stirred the forest at the time favoured my close approach, and though but barely to be felt, could not be lightly disregarded, because these animals, to whom an inability to see beyond a trifling distance is imputed generally, are gifted with extraordinary powers of hearing and a delicate sense of smell. By a gift of fortune, therefore, it was easy for me so to place myself in a position as to take advantage of that favourite shot by which the brain is penetrated through the ear, and the animal thus easily dispatched. I dropped upon a knee in the sweltering heat, and fired, sure of my aim at that short range, for with this rifle even at two hundred confidence was mine. The creature staggered and went down upon its forefeet where for a second it remained, and then to my amazement rose again, turned round completely in the opposite direction, and commenced to move off slowly back again along the tracks the herd had made that morning. The animal had obviously been hit, but I could not account for its extraordinary activity, and as there was no time for speculation, I ran quickly forward to within a distance of some fifteen yards of the great plodding mass and fired another round into the corresponding spot upon its other side; whereupon the waiting minions came with a rush towards the fallen beast. The four remaining cows had made off straight ahead, in the direction they had faced, immediately the first round had been fired, which was of course a favourable eventuality during the sequences of this encounter.

The simple tracking of an elephant has been

related—if you should wish to read of less fortuitous but infinitely more stirring incidents connected with the chase of such, you cannot better do than turn to the inimitable works of Stigand, one-time famous hunter, who was killed by Nuers when on an expedition in the south Sudan. He at the time was Governor of the U.N.P., not long before my arrival in the country.

Both bullets were found in the brain of the animal I had shot. I learnt afterwards from a professional source that, though unusual, such incidents as I had witnessed then were quite accountable, for it is possible to leave unhurt that portion of the brain concerned with locomotion, and yet to still the other part, so that the animal may move about a little while before it ultimately dies; but if the locomotor region of the brain be hit, it will fall motionless immediately.

It was close on one o'clock before I realised the miles we were from any known locality, since after the pre-occupations of the chase this did not dawn on me at once, and it was obvious there could be no waste of time if we were to be back at Abu Sa'id before the fall of night. So we commenced to wend our way along the morning's trail, knotting the grass at intervals to make its recognition all the easier on the morrow, and reaching the village some time after sunset. The following day was the occasion of such an exodus as must have been of rare occurrence in that district, if indeed there ever was its parallel, before or since. For a full majority of the inhabitants set out with me at dawn towards the kill—a motley concourse of exuberant natives, accompanied by the customary multitude of wives, armed with all kinds of baskets and destructive instruments; and on arrival at the field of yesterday's encounter there followed detailed re-enactment, though it

was modified in form, of those blood-thirsty scenes that earlier in the year had marked the barbarous scramble at the "hippo" kill upon the banks of the Zeraf. While a pair of volunteers were hacking away at the roots of the tusks, a mixed party of eager Arabs was in process of cutting up the body of the elephant and dividing morsels of the carcass up amongst themselves. There were the same dissections of the interior, the same studied conservation of every available portion of the anatomy; and if the partition was conducted in a more methodical manner, and in a spirit of greater amiability than in the corresponding case, nevertheless the final results were much the same, and a long trail of butcher specialists accompanied each other in my wake as the party wended its way back at close of day.

Wandering through the forest next day with my shikari and three or four associates, in the hope of meeting with fresh tracks, fortune was very kind to me, and the event described must be of mighty rare occurrence—indeed I question whether a recorded parallel is known. All through the heat of noon-tide hours we had travelled far and wide, and were traversing the region of reputed breeding grounds referred to previously, when with a keenness much to be commended one of the hunting posse spotted an object lying on the ground some distance off, and shining white between the trees. A marvellous fortuity—here were the skull and skin and bones of a dead elephant; dead this many a day, with tusks intact! The latter being hacked from out their sockets, I turned back to camp with joyous heart.

It was during my sojourn in this forest camp that there befell me the experience which has been the lot of some—to lose oneself for a space within the trackless bush after becoming separated from one's

kind—and though mine was a short and temporary duress, it did not fail to trace upon my mind the outline of a picture that in other circumstances might have portrayed a fierce reality far more formidable than the one confronting me on that occasion. I had wandered off alone in hope of meeting with wild pig, the locality being known as its much favoured habitat—in point of fact we had discerned one in the course of traversing a dried-up “khor” that morning—and having moved with energy across wide areas of surrounding country I became suddenly aware of the lateness of the hour, for the sun had set and dusk was falling fast. But ere I had made much progress on the homeward journey, darkness encompassed me about, and my sense of true direction soon became a negligible asset, for of guidance the vicinity could give me none. I fired off a round into the gloom, awaiting hopefully the welcome message of an answering shot—waited in vain for all lay still. Then through the forest glades I sent resounding hollers that echoed back and forth but brought no clear nor faint response. I commenced to circumambulate the ground in many wide concentric circles (or so I thought them), hollering at intervals, but without result. It dawned upon me then that if I was to rest that night it would be only as I lay upon the ground with eye and ear alert. There came the call of a leopard, distant, low and weird—and another answered. A light wind stirred the branches of the trees, and the rustle of leaves was overhead. The soft nocturnal sighs of zephyrs brought a strange loneliness to the scene. Heaven wot—I was alone. Alone in a solitude of forest darkness that was utterly profound. I wandered on, straining my ears to catch the slightest sound, and my eyes to note the faintest flickering

of a remote camp fire. But an impenetrable gloom, a deathly silence, relieved only by the leaf-screened, starpoint brilliancy from on high, and the hesitating murmurs of the breeze of night, shrouded the forest in an unresponsive pall. I clambered through the obstructive, thorn-lined tentacles of jutting branches, at some cost to the exposed portions of my body, into the lower boughs of an accessible tree, in the hope that intermittent sounds of calling voices might the more easily reach my ears. Again I hollered heartily, and yet again. Then in a little while across the night there came to me the welcome shoutings of my party, faint yet definite enough, and these in due course led me back to camp and nourishment.

With the conclusion of these unforeseen diversions on the Khor Agalin, and the completion of assessments in the neighbourhood, it was now time to move on back along the Khor and so regain the more frequented areas of the riverside. Thus in a day's march did I find myself once more upon the right bank of the Nile, to follow its northward course until within a mile of Singa. At this point the local ferry landed us upon the other side: my Blue Nile journey was complete.

The Governor of the province had returned since my departure on the last recounted journey, and a very excellent and charming man he was. He told me frankly he did not suppose that my activities while on the province staff had in themselves relieved the work that fell upon the shoulders of the rest, or that I brought a useful knowledge of conditions locally to bear upon the tasks allotted me. That, he said, was quite beside the point, for he considered that the very presence of a white man to receive complaints and grievances, when and if ever they arose, well justified the time expended on the journeys

I had lately undertaken. I agree. It is even more important from administrative standpoints, if not from a judicial angle, in the case of all the savage-peopled provinces along the Upper Nile; for amongst the arab population recognition of the strength of British justice always has been universal and profound, and reliance placed on its impartial distribution both implicit and entire.

As an example of this unwavering confidence the deputy-governor at Singa told me of his experience in a like position when serving in another province. His senior, in a moment of some aberration from the course of equity, had placed himself in an invidious light regarding his relations with an Arab, who, with a proper sense of his oppression, laid his full tale of tribulation at my narrator's feet, giving a hint that in the event of not receiving satisfaction he should take the matter to Khartoum. The Governor was approached by his own deputy, who, being met at first with a refusal, then frankly warned his senior of the consequence should he remain unwilling to present some compensation to the man, and this he finally persuaded him to do. So in due course money was handed out to the oppressed one by the oppressor's deputy, accompanied by a carefully worded explanation of the great one's magnanimity, his generosity and fine consideration, suitably acknowledged by the recipient with the Oriental's sphinx-like calm. "But", said my informant, "he knew well enough."

Before leaving the station I was fortunate in making the acquaintance of a pair of worthy representatives of British stock—the province engineer and his young wife. He was a dapper little man, bubbling with energy and with a reputation of having been a first-class boxer. Although apparently quite capable of looking after his establishment,

he had acquired, or shall I say had been acquired by a young "cave-woman" twenty years his junior, to whom he had become engaged on leave at home. This handsome, strapping wench would not hear anything of his suggestion as to remaining for another span in England; she had not been easily inclined, no doubt, to suffer that invaluable catch to slither back into the tranquil seas of bachelordom, and insisted on their being married and accompanying him to the Sudan. Here she was indeed a radiant star within a firmament that was otherwise devoid of all romantic light, and held her court upon occasion, it would seem, with the efficiency of an effective Amazon and the furore of a Pompadour.

One of the last of my impressions of the Blue Nile once again returns to me as I recall myself one evening lingering after sunset on its banks, and meditating there under the influence of balmy vapours rising from the surface of the river, to hang above it in a shroud but scarcely visible. There is a sense of relaxation in the atmosphere, such as will come at nightfall in these regions after the passing of the heat of day with its accompanying glare. Silence has fallen on the scene and, like the fleeting rays of sunlight now illumining the western sky, is golden too. The water front fades off into the gathering shades of darkening night and a few irregularly-spaced trees bring to its dimming outline a relief of contour that will soon be mingled in obscurity. Upon the further bank there stands a heavy screen of forest growth, trees and scrub, which like a wall of mystery is set against the uncertain background of the sky. And as I muse in peaceful contemplation of the failing scene a distant cry that bears a strange familiarity in its note is wafted on the stillness of the evening air. Such have I heard by night in recent weeks, as, at the close of

250 A NOMAD IN THE SOUTH SUDAN

day, I camped beside the river, and, in like quietude, listened to varied sounds from out the solitude of deepening shade. Strangely resembling oft-repeated leopard calls, this curious cry comes from the monkey bands inhabiting the Blue Nile forests, and as my thoughts are turned towards that evening scene, so comes the cry again.

CHAPTER XI

SOUTH AGAIN

It is mid-December now, and I have just returned from Singa. I cannot relish the idea of all the gaiety and social round which the approaching winter season is about to usher in at the metropolis. My former haunts must claim me soon or I shall sink in gloom. Already the serenity of my rude bachelor retreat has been disturbed by the distressing fanfare of a negroid military band, and feminine invasion of the precincts of the club, during the course of a terpsichorean function of considerable duration, has proved both reprehensible and most inopportune. This is no place for lovers of the bush. So I confer with colleagues in the office of the Civil Secretary, and in due course, after I have been before a board of doctors, a willing government reposts me to the scenes of my first labours in the country.

The climate at this season in Khartoum has much to recommend it. Dry as ever, and, save in the midday hours, of a pleasing warmth, there are few counts on which it can be criticised, for the time of dust-storm winds lies well ahead. This is the season when advanced guards of the tourist armies start on their peaceful penetrations from the north, and the commercial element, masking its eagerness under the cloak of polished and obsequious platitudes, meets the occasion in an attitude of hopeful enterprise. The scene within Capato's is at most times one of genial briskness, many local residents

foregathering in the evening for the contemplation of their daily needs. Visiting the establishment one afternoon upon my own account, in order to arrange for my supplies during the coming months, I happened on a certain well-known sportsman lately out from England, who was also occupied with the arrangements of his commissariat for an impending shooting trip along the Nile. He had just met a friend, an official of some local prominence, and was seeking news about belongings that had gone astray during their separate journey to Khartoum. No, it seemed, they had not yet been received by the authorities in question. "What, Buggins! But this is terrible, terrible! What are we going to do? Oh, Buggins, this is dreadful! It's terrible!" And to the accompaniment of martial wheezings and many appeals to reason (except his own), the desperate state of this unhappy sportsman's lot was laid before such concourse as, being present, cared to listen, in a manner that went far towards suggesting that the temporary betrayal of his plans was filled with the significance of a defeat upon the field of battle. This is one type of seasonal visitant, who in displaying to the world his sense of personal importance, gives many a smile to the perennial toiler in the distant wilds. Others there are, too. One, as an instance, arrived at Singa filled with a brave ingenuity of ideas for the destruction of a buffalo. He was resolved, it seemed, to follow an unusual line of action. Since he was not at pains to hide his lack of confidence in his ability to hit a target at a reasonable range, he was proposing to employ a shot-gun first to blind his quarry and, thus advantaged, to despatch the creature at close quarters with a rifle. In sorrow were arrangements made for careful supervision of his future zeal, and the shikaris warned about the idiosyncrasies with which they might

be called upon to deal, and instructed also in their full responsibility for the unmarred return of their impetuous charge.

Yet one other seasonable variety is exemplified by a young Amazon accompanying her father down the White Nile in a native dhow, and who, unprovided with a shelter that could give her proper privacy from the attendant arab crew, deferred her own retirement until all the lights had been extinguished (since there was no cabin), and was forced to rise betimes at the first flush of dawn under the exigencies of the sweet modesty that she retained. The majority of feminine enthusiasts do not of course subject themselves to such unnecessary rigours, and usually accompany their spouses or their parties in all the modern comfort of a chartered steamer. Upon the other hand, wives of officials do on occasion venture with their husbands in the bush, although invariably discouraged from such action, because regrettable eventualities may well occur at any time.

There is the perfectly true story of a man and wife who were on "safaria" with a friend—the latter being possessed of a temperament that was not altogether free from certain elements of crudity. Wandering by himself in the forest one day, at a short distance from the camp, he espied through the trees the looming, nude posterior of an individual whom he took to be his friend. "Heavens, Humphrey!" he exclaimed, in an aggressive voice, "what an enormous bohind you have got!" There was no reply, so he advanced further, hailing his friend with all the riotous abandon of a schoolboy: yet no reply was offered. "Wotcher, Humphrey," he yelled, but the figure was as marble. Then he looked intently once again, and awoke in agony to proper understanding of his fall from grace, for it

was his colleague's wife he had addressed! He fled the spot like one possessed, and when the camp was struck the horrified comedian had already travelled on. . . . Once again I join the small crowd of soldiers and officials making the southward journey from Khartoum, to pass in pleasant company along the immortal route. At Kosti we are greeted after his common custom by the burly "bonhomme" who had invaded the steamer on the occasion of my first voyage south. The hearty fellow carries me off in company with an outsize in fighting soldiers who is also a passenger upon the boat. We retire to the outskirts of the town, and, having entered the habitation of our jovial host, sit down to beer and Irish songs. The former comes to hand in execution of a rush order given to one of the local traders. The latter is provided by this jolly Falstaff personally, and for a full half-hour we are both regaled with many patriotic and rebellious rhapsodies, of which the most outstanding is "The wearin' of the Green"—sung with a fire and an enthusiasm that in the atmosphere of the small room is overwhelming. More beer on board after our return to the steamer, and this master of conviviality descends the gangway just before we leave in a state of fully boisterous jocularly.

And so by gentle and familiar stages back to Malakal.

CHAPTER XII

FURTHER TRAVELS

It was Boxing Day when I regained the company of my former colleagues, three or four of whom had come to Malakal for Christmas time, and there did not lack informants able to acquaint me with the march of circumstances in my absence. The rains had been much below normal and as a consequence the native "dura" crop in every district had been singularly poor. Away up in the Garjok Nuer country the combination of an inborn sloth with negligible harvests had resulted in a minor famine. To combat this the D.C. then concerned had swept down hurriedly on Malakal, during the absence of the Governor on leave and his deputy on local affairs, and in a burst of humanitarian zeal had all but cleared away the whole reserve of "dura" held in store, loading a province steamer and then making off along the Sobat to his barbarous home. The temporary consternation later holding sway at headquarters, due to the zealotry of this official, gave ample proof, were any needed, that every form of zeal in these dispersed localities has dire need of adequate co-ordination to the whole!

In my own district there were nebulous reports of some hostility on the part of the chief Dwal Diu, although no definite messages had been received; and in any case it was certain all the natives had by this time left the Duk for their respective "marahs", so that any trouble near Ayod seemed most unlikely.

256 A NOMAD IN THE SOUTH SUDAN

Under these circumstances, however, there appeared to be some reason for my prompt departure, and having formed a complementary quota of police to bring the numbers at the post to normal working strength, and then amassed a further quantity of primitive emoluments in kind, I journeyed off again to Khor Atar.

Long ere we reached Ayod the signs of meagre rainfall through the season lately passed became available on every hand, for not only was the countryside more parched this January than was the case a year ago, but the number of pools still holding any water proved to be much reduced. The large "fula Gaweir" was very low when we passed by, and shortly afterwards dried up completely—a rare occurrence, so the Nuers say. A fleeting sojourn here enabled me to get another Reedbuck head, for a fair-sized herd had gathered near the spot.

I remember once, as I rode listlessly along the route at midday, how I was all but jolted from the saddle as my mule shied unexpectedly at what on close acquaintance proved to be a python, and which casually slid off into the grass. The Sudan is singularly free from snakes, and during all my two years' service in the country once only did I come across a poisonous variety, and this was killed outside the offices in Malakal. On another occasion I was pulling away some dirt from the roof of a "tukl" in which I purported to pass an hour or so during a noon-tide halt on "safaria", when something struck at me from underneath the thatch and bit my hand so that the wound was almost imperceptible. Search soon revealed a nasty-looking whitish snake with very pointed teeth, but local information guaranteed the species harmless, and a subsequent battue found culmination in the slaughter of a reptile four or five feet long. With the

exception of one other incident, related afterwards, these were the sole occasions when the trail of the serpent crossed my path.

Having reached the Duk it was to find a very scanty remnant of the Shen Kerfail remaining in the neighbourhood. The aged ruffian of a chief came forth to greet me, but my police experienced difficulties in securing any water, for mighty little was available and that was being guarded jealously. Fearing that we intended lingering in the place beyond the night, and that they would be deprived of their supplies, the little band of village dwellers made off by night to their "marah", and shortly after dawn the following day we set out also on our final trek, to reach Ayod that afternoon.

My excellent Shawish Sabah El Khair welcomed me at the head of his small force with the effusion usually bestowed on a triumphant potentate, and the reception generally accorded me by male and female populace alike was in its sheer enthusiasm very gratifying even if quite devoid of any reasonable cause.

My cares were naturally first concerned with all available reports upon the local situation. It appeared the chief Dwal Diu had recently become invested with the specious signs of a "kujur", and in this guise had managed to extend the sphere of his authority. He had paid no visit to the post for quite a time, since this, I was informed, would have been thought a form of weakness by his own supporters, who attributed his state to supernatural powers. Although no question had arisen as to his engaging in nefarious moves against the government, there seemed to be no doubt that a reminder of its hale existence might be a wise precaution, and be of benefit to the community of natives as a whole. Especially was this the case in view of circumstances

attending the career of the preceding "kujur" who, as Dwal's grandfather, had been a source of frequent trouble in the Gaweir district during former years—a trouble that had been increased through failure to ensure such prompt and vigorous action as would have countered the effects of his subversive tendencies while in an early stage, and which eventually necessitated the sending of an expedition to ensure his downfall.

So, actuated by a sense of duty that required my visiting the scene of Dwal's activities, and with the added object of discovering for myself the nature of the chief peculiarities affected by a "kujur" under the assumed influence of his spirit force, I set off with a small party of police along the track that led towards the "marah" where Dwal and all his following were now assembled. This "marah" was then situated to the south-west of Ayod upon a "khor" connected with the Bahr El Zeraf, and was reached across the absolutely waterless and treeless plain that filled the space between it and the Duk. I have attempted in some previous pages to describe the utter desolation of the country lying to the west of Duk Ayod, and of all routes that typify such desolation at its worst none could be better chosen for the purpose than the track which leads to the locality selected by Dwal Diu and his associates for habitation through the drought. After a practically unbroken march since daybreak with perhaps an hour's rest from one to two o'clock, during the whole of which long period hardly a single landmark had appeared upon the scene to throw a shadow on the sweltering plain, the setting sun imposed consideration of a resting place, and there was nothing else to do but settle down unceremoniously beside the open track. And so we passed a night upon an unmapped point within a

neighbourhood that could not better be defined than by a general reference rather to the middle of nowhere than to the back of beyond—for what more truthful epithet could fairly be ascribed to this forsaken spot it is beyond a man's ability to say. Another similar march upon the following day, and in the waning afternoon the cone-shaped tops of temporary grass dwellings, at first merged in the horizon, studded with our approach the nether limits of the sky. A few Nuers were engaged in spearing fish among the reeds which grew along the edges of the "khor", and noticed the arrival of the party from afar, when all showed signs of great excitement. As we approached them, further bearers of the record of our coming dashed off towards the "marah", there to swell the numbers that had first departed with that object, the later emissaries no doubt following with detailed information on the composition of the little band of unexpected visitors. The "khor" was two or three feet deep in water, and a pair of naked savages carried me across, after which I rode ahead to meet the horde of lean barbarians that had collected on the outskirts of the "marah" and were now running up to us. Foremost amongst this throng was Bang, Dwal's right-hand man. But what a world of difference lay between the comic-looking ruffian who had left my presence in Ayod last year, clothed in a headman's robe resembling more a Japanese kimono than the resplendent mark of tribal dignity for which it had been meant, and the abandoned, laughing savage who now leapt up and down about me with a careless grace, brandishing his spears in all the raimentless exuberance of Nuer youth! He had added to the splendid contours of his body, upon which the knotted muscles showed to advantage in the sunlight, by mounting on his head a pile of

pink-hued shells, with the result that in the midst of all the unkempt creatures that surrounded him, each of them sporting a dishevelled mop of hair, he cut a notably outstanding figure. Greeting me in a friendly way, but with assurance and familiarity that I found somewhat inwardly disquieting, he joined with others at the heels of my perspiring mule, and at the head of an apparently triumphal progress I proceeded to the centre of the "marah". Here I dismounted and was told through my interpreter, one Biet, that Dwal was shortly to appear upon the scene. So I waited on the spot, and in a little while a double line of Nuers, roughly twenty yards in length, came out from the surrounding "tukls" and converged upon the open space on which I stood. Upon the face of each, as I stood scanning this array of martial zeal, there was a strong expression of expectant interest, and an air of gravity that is not usually associated with these folk hung in the air and charged it with uncertainty about the things to come. Within a very little space of time, however, matters were free from doubt, for an extraordinary apparition burst through the attendant ranks of Nuers in the persons of two savages supporting in their arms the seemingly half drunken figure of the "kujur" Dwal. Staggering forward thus, the latter now approached by intermittent lurches to within five yards of where I stood, remaining there a short while in a state of well-feigned helplessness, his body limp and he pretending to be dazed, and foaming at the mouth. This obvious farce must needs be faced and dealt with in some way or other, and a decision as to how the circumstance might best be met had to be reached at once. Although the impostor was of course aware his antics were by me regarded as a futile exhibition and was behaving in this way with no intention to deceive nor with

the slightest hope of doing so, there was small doubt that on his proper conduct of these evolutions in my presence much of his future tribal prestige would depend. Such indeed lay clearly proven in the faces of the crowd of curious watchers who were holding back some fifteen yards or so behind their chief. There seemed no reason for my criticism of this maniacal "kujurism", provided that it did not tend to set authority at nought, while any strengthening of this new exponent's power of leadership amongst the independent, warring Nuer "shens" could be considered only as a step towards a wider spread allegiance to a tribal head, and, through him, to the government itself.

As he stood there, foaming and muttering, the two supporting henchmen seemed to be reasoning with him, urging him forward, and taking a firmer grip upon his body. I walked up to him with due solemnity, and as if in a state of uncontrolled feebleness he held out a limp and heavy hand, which I grasped in the brisk, encouraging manner of a medical practitioner. He spoke no word to me, but sank back in his minions' arms again, foaming at the mouth. A frenzy of excitement and exuberance dominated all the watching host, and they commenced in raucous unison to sing a war-song of their own. This primitive cantata was continued for about a minute, during which the "kujur" seemed to be regaining something of his former strength, and at its termination he showed every sign of having once again become a normal man. I now instructed my interpreter to acquaint him with my usual wants regarding milk supplies, and to inform him I proposed to pass the night amongst his "shen", and the two were soon in conversation. It was not long before I had myself become a party to this intercourse, and it was soon explained to me

that all the recent manifestations had for the moment passed away. Whilst I was thus engaged in this less formal meeting the attendant warriors had applied themselves with ardour to some further rendering of their militaristic chants, and ere they finally abandoned those expressions of approval Dwal and Bang and half a dozen other myrmidons were leading me towards the chief's official residence—a spacious, three-sided canopy of grass and wooden poles. Here in this tribal sanctum, after my cook and boy had made arrangements for my ease, I held a sort of court, creating by my quips and jesting platitudes an atmosphere of *bonhomie* that was apparently a source of mirthful satisfaction to the assembled company. After some thirty minutes of this persiflage there came to me desire for a spell of solitude, and summoning my personal staff I bade them concentrate upon the preparation of the evening meal, instructing the interpreter to tell the native gathering that I wished it to retire. Dwal and his crude accomplices, however, preferred to linger in my company, and this they intimated through their spokesman, so that policemen had eventually to bundle out the concourse from the shack unceremoniously—a procedure that no doubt restored the government's prestige amongst the noisy rabble that perhaps had been encouraged too effectually by reason of the cheery and informal atmosphere created by my utterly inconsequential talk.

Later, as I was leaning back in my camp chair, pondering amusedly over the sequence of events related, there appeared around the corner of the shelter to my front the peeping visage of a little Nuer maid. With all the artful tentativeness of her sex the hussy lingered on the threshold and to my beckoning invitation offered a genuine display

of modest hesitation, arriving by my side after a show of coyness that would have warmed the heart of a benighted misanthrope. I handed her a lump of sugar which brought a sign of radiant pleasure to her eyes; but still she dared not speak. I said soft words of light encouragement in arabic, which were of course incomprehensible to her, but did at least bear witness of an interest on my part. There was about her entry something suggestive of propitiation—she must have been despatched to me, no doubt, as a peace offering, for she would not have ventured into this retreat without some prompting from without; but as no common tongue availed us opportunities for the expression of our mutual feelings and contrasting outlook were far too definitely curtailed to warrant her protracted stay beneath my temporary roof. So I plied her with a further quantity of sugar, administering a few paternal pats upon the more outstanding charms of her anatomy, in token of a patronage of which the consummation neither my position nor my inclination could allow, and intimated by the firm yet tactful mastery of my regard that there must be a seemly close to the short reign of this ingenuous, unadorned, and virgin queen. So she left my presence, wreathed in a girlish smile and dusky skin, and whether under the proverbial cloak of disappointment at the limited success of an ambitious scheme or in relief at its ambitious failure, I have neither the concern nor the ability to venture an opinion.

On the following day I set out north for Rufshendol, a neighbourhood conspicuous for its "dom" palms, which extend in clumps both large and small over a space of two or three miles along the route that leads to the Zeraf. Several "shens" are settled in this region and there is always water to be had in an adjacent "khor". Some portions of this

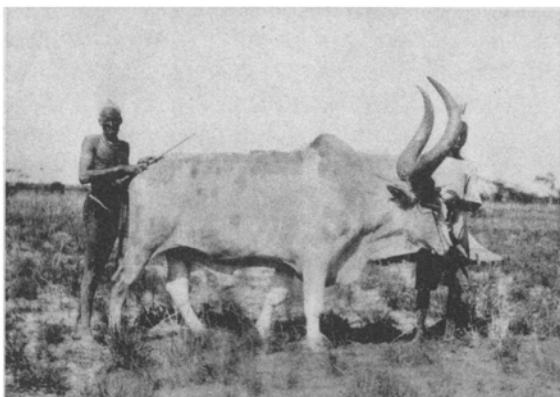
palm oasis almost assume a forest character, and the entire locality offers a welcome respite from the surrounding plain. A chain of villages run through the area, and the extent of native cultivations freely reflects activity above the average of the district. To enter into such a neighbourhood after a trek across interminable, deserted plains, where for a space of hours a single palm tree has on a flank provided unreservedly the only feature rising from the arid plain is comfort certainly, and source for inward joy. For these high palms, towering it may be fifty or sixty feet above the ground and separated from each other by some yards of sandy soil, furnish not only shaded respite from the insistent sun, but so alter those portions of the plain whereon they stand as to endow them with a character and sense of haven far remote from all the countryside surrounding them, giving the weary traveller such a pleasant sense of restful change as to induce him to a longer stay amidst the shifting shadows of the generous foliage that distinguishes the scene.

The chiefs of "shens" residing in this area had for a long while been on terms of understanding with the government, and the extent of their plantations was sufficient to enable them to pay their tribute in supplies of "dura" without inflicting undue hardship on the villagers. So the occasion of this visit furnished an opportunity to arrange for "dura" convoys to Ayod under the supervision of the native leaders; and to all sections of the area I accorded freedom in delivery so as to ascertain to what extent reliance might be placed upon the chief's authority. Later events in this connection proved to be highly satisfactory, useful amounts of corn arriving at my headquarters before the season's end.

(A)



(B)



(C)



(A) NUER VILLAGERS.

(B) PRIZE NUER BULL.

(C) NUER MAIDENS; SHEIKH DENG ON RIGHT.

At the northern extremity of Rufshendol lived Deng, the faithful chief who a year previously and more had made the initial journey with me to Ayod from Malakal. We reached this point to spend the night, and the gawky fellow beamed upon me with a set of garishly protruding teeth that filled a most capacious mouth and not an inconsiderable space outside it, renewing his allegiance with a show of feeling that, feigned or real, it was a pleasure to experience. Knowing of old my partiality for milk whenever it could be procured my faithful follower had arranged for liberal supplies to be forthcoming, and towards sunset the accustomed bevy of respectable young virgins filed up to me, bearing in "garas" on their heads a generous offering from the local native herd. The following day I made off expeditiously towards the river, and Deng, who was apparently most eager to accompany me upon my travels for another period, was of the party too.

The telephone connecting with Awoi travels beside the native path for some miles in this region, and at the point it meets with the Zeraf the "marahs" of some native "shens" are every year located. But having visited the chiefs and spent a night in camp upon the river banks I hastened to regain the shelter of my simple home upon the Duk, and thence despatch to province headquarters the first of the reports which in the past the governor had from time to time received from me. . . .

I have already mentioned the severeness of the drought resulting from the meagre rainfall of the preceding year, but the duress of travel under such conditions has not yet been favoured with the mention it deserves. One journey in particular stands out aggressively in a review of many marches undertaken from Ayod during the period I describe,

and if exceptional in character is not unrepresentative of hardships frequently entailed for the police accompanying me; it must be borne in mind in this connection that whereas I always travelled mounted, the remainder of my party went on foot. This was a visit to the district round Awoi, reached through a far-flung area of open talc bush that abuts upon the "khalla" stretching out towards the river. Awoi itself is a long straggling neighbourhood of native "tukls" extending out into the uncomprising wastes, and a few miles on beyond the villages so formed there stands a telephone "redoubt"—a small enclosure boasting three or four small "tukls" housing a community of miscellaneous souls and situated on a long canal-like "khor" that cuts across from the Zeraf to their vicinity. The man in charge is a retired "Q.M.S." of the Egyptian army—a hoary-headed sinner who can read and write in arabic and make himself articulate to colleagues on the line. He also is a chief of certain standing, though the "shen" of which he is the leader is located many miles away. This faithful henchman of the government proved very useful to me periodically throughout the season, for as no "mamur" had this year been posted to my district, the arithmetical and literary proficiency that he possessed were of great value in the presentation of accounts, and distribution of their pay to the police. The money question at Ayod was always something of a nuisance to a man who had but little time to spare in his headquarters, and was not prepared to take responsibility for all the minor sums of money needed in administering the post. My predecessor had installed a safe, but cash requirements generally were met by the despatch of money in sealed bags from Malakal. This practice proved unsatisfactory in the main,

however, and was abandoned, round about the time of which I write, in favour of a permanently coffered sum of money at Ayod, and it was Faragallah Buluk Amin¹ to whom I turned for proper rendering of its state from time to time.

There are a number of Nuer marahs dotted about across the wastes that lie between Awoi and the Zeraf, and it was the homeward journey from this neighbourhood that above all impressed me with a lasting sense of hardship during travel over these abandoned plains, and the unfortunate results ensuing from eventualities that have not been foreseen and against which therefore no provision has been made. Wishing to make the Duk by a route as yet unknown to me, and having heard that there was still a small available supply of water in some "fulas" in a village situated on that route, I set out from a point quite near Awoi, with every water bottle filled. There was neither hope nor expectation of our reaching any "fula" till the following day was well advanced, so that in any case the least reliance had to be placed upon our scant supplies. Needless to say, the police had drunk their fill by nightfall, and when the setting sun required a halt it was a very parched and weary little band that turned to shift the baggage from a sweating mule quartette. A little tepid tea, and a few British biscuits that have long since lost the aroma of their pristine freshness, do not supply a very satisfying meal at the conclusion of a day's continuous march; but needs must when the devil drives, and a cool starry night comes as a wondrous tonic following on the heat of day.

It is strange what distances some animals will wander off in search of food and how in the midst

¹ Ar. Quarter-Master Sergeant "Joy of God."

of what is practically a desert waste of sun-dried grass, such as these regions are, one may encounter scavengers and beasts of prey. I can remember well this night, a short while after moonrise, how the lugubrious howls of some hyænas, wafted at first upon the still night air from far away, came nearer yet and nearer to our camping ground. Then for a brief space all was peace, until with the increasing restlessness the "hamla" showed there came an indication that the beasts were near at hand. I sat upon the edge of my camp-bed, the shelter of whose blankets I had not yet sought, and in a little while, to the accompaniment of grassy rustlings, I could see their beady demon eyes of sparkling green glittering in the darkness with a curious steadfastness. I left my seat and with a forward stride paced out towards the watching scavengers, which by the evidence of several pair of eyes must have composed a mingled company; there was a startled rush, and off they bolted through the gloom. But they appeared again, and neither sticks nor shouts could keep them long from the continuance of their hopeful vigil which they maintained at a respectful distance of some twenty yards until with the first rays of dawn they stole away. We too, with the increasing flush of light that heralded the day, set out upon the fresh uncertainty of travel. The hours wore on and as we forged ahead the ascending sun began to take its toll of human energy. Around eleven o'clock, however, after about six hours' unbroken march, we passed an isolated "tukl" in the bush, which doubtless was a sign of habitation close at hand, but not a living soul seemed present, and there was no answer to our hailing cries. A short but frenzied search by sweating volunteers disclosed some other "tukls", but of water not a sign. There was the likely waste

of precious time involved in carrying out a more extended search, and as no sure success might be relied upon to crown our efforts I decided to push on towards the Ridge, which we should reach before the night had overtaken us. A well-earned respite underneath a heglig tree from one to two o'clock, and on again. My men had most of them drunk nothing for the twenty-four hours past, and save through the night had been marching all the time. It was round about two hours after we resumed our journey that the situation then assumed a somewhat parlous aspect—men began to stagger and the animals to falter underneath their loads. Frequent halts were called for, and for every half an hour's march ten minutes' rest was meet and due. But as the sun was setting we approached the outskirts of a belt of bush, and this at least did herald in the final stages of our journey, if the sketchy information on my district map was true. But at this juncture one of my police sank to the ground exhausted, to be followed shortly after by some others, all of whom sought for rest beneath the talc trees by the track. Most of these I managed to encourage or upbraid, but one had reached a state of such completely careless stupefaction that, when I lightly kicked and prodded him to urge him forward still, he lay quite motionless upon the ground, staring thereat in bovine misery, and I could only leave him. Others straggled too, and I pressed on ahead with cook and sundry stalwarts hoping to gain the post and thence despatch a water-laden mule for their relief. However, it so happened that the pair of Nuers who had started out with us, and, as men acquainted with the district, harboured a very shrewd suspicion of impending casualty, had left the party at the midday halt and moved along at speed towards Ayod. So by the grace of Providence it came about

that as dusk descended on us we were met by parties from the post accompanying a mule with water-bags, and these were quickly emptied of their whole contents. My cook was first to drink his fill, snatching in ogre fashion at the leaking bags, and had I not assumed a threatening attitude towards his efforts to imbibe without restraint, there would not have remained a particle for all his luckless friends in rear, for in his eagerness to satisfy a primitive desire great quantities of precious fluid poured down his shirt upon the ground. The evening was advanced when I reached home, and it was night before the last beleaguered wanderer had filtered through to the protection of the post. . . .

So formidable a drought it was this year that even at Ayod the well was now a source of only limited supply, the need for yet another well, already put in hand, becoming daily more apparent. There was, however, no occasion for a stay of long duration here, and the prospect of another journey occupied my mind. In the meantime the consideration of some petty matters of a miscellaneous kind demanded my attention. The senior commissioner, for example, had a furious zest for gardening, and in compliance with his wish I undertook to make collections of the seeds of all the various trees that flourished on the Duk—a brilliant task indeed! Then there was also a domestic trouble calling for attention on behalf of the interpreter-in-chief, in consequence of which I found myself confronted by an angered father who had brought his daughter up before me with correctional intent. The gist of his complaint was that the maiden utterly refused to marry whom he willed—a man, that is, whose pastoral wealth was notable and would have furnished a prospective pa-in-law with welcome increase to his herd. I parleyed with the greedy-minded

plaintiff for his daughter's freedom, while she with all the arts and graces of her sex sought hard to gain my sympathies, doubting most likely where they lay. But being dominated by a blinding lust for property he still maintained his pristine attitude. "Do you not wish your daughter's happiness?" I said to him. "Yes," he replied, "but I desire my own as well. I want her to marry and bear children and be content and prosper, but *I* desire the cows—then we shall all be happy." This frame of mind presented certain obvious difficulties, and I could only counsel him to let things rest until the parties re-considered their affairs: in any case, no native law could force the girl against her will. He was displeased.

On my return to the station this year I had brought with me a heavy trap which I proposed to use for catching leopards—not as a form of mis-directed sport, but as a means of lessening the numbers of those vermin who are worse despoilers of the country's game than any other agency involved. My predecessor had two years previously caught nine or ten, and yet a further five or six were soon to fall to me. The mode of setting the contraption was to cover it with grass and brushwood and to place it at the entrance to a small zareba built round a shallow, scooped-out hollow in the soil about three feet in width, which was at nightfall duly filled with water. One of the jaws was attached by a metal chain to a log of wood heavy enough to prevent any attempt at dragging it away. It was invariably the case that being caught the victim would remain entirely mute and motionless, until the approach of parties with a lantern, when it would rush from the concealment of the small zareba hurling itself in their direction to the extent permitted by the chain. There was no question of the

beast remaining more than very little time within the trap, for this would close with such a terrific snap that it could hardly fail to draw the attention of the sentry posted fifty yards away. During my absence a wild dog was captured in this manner—the animal was rare in this locality and of a breed that generally hunts in packs. The Nuers say they sometimes go so far as to attack a woman or a child (who are not armed with spears), but my experience of the animals is limited to my acquaintance with a skin, and I have never come across them in the flesh, alive or dead.

In the course of one of my protracted absences the previous season, the commissioner in charge of the adjoining district to the south had paid Ayod a visit, and it was with the intention of repaying this, and of discussing certain points of common interest, that I had previously arranged to meet him in his district early in the year. So at the end of this short sojourn I set out along the Ridge towards Duk Faiwal, from which centre the surrounding district was controlled. The native track leaves southward from Ayod through country typifying as a whole the general aspect of the Duk, although it loses something of its more attractive features such as the frequency of "dabbas" and of jungle undergrowth. At the time of which I write the northern boundary line of the Mongalla province cut right across the Ridge about halfway between Duk Faiwal and Ayod, but the entire district centred on the former station is now incorporated in the U.N.P. A few hours' journey from Ayod there lies Duk Fadiat—then just within Mongalla's limits—and here are found a "dabba" richly crowned with splendid trees and having sandy water-holes that serve the needs of man and beast alike. The countryside around has many "tukls", and quite a large

community of Dinkas find their normal residence within the neighbourhood, which in the time of drought, however, is deserted, save for a small police force then marooned within the post.

Between Duk Fadiat and Duk Faiwal the countryside becomes more open, losing to some extent the general features of the Ridge. A good road suitable for bullock carts connects the two localities, and from the latter travels on to Bor, which serves the district as a river base. The approach to Faiwal is distinguished by a forest of "kharubs", and the vicinity itself is marked by scattered "dabbas" as in the case around Ayod, although the former spot is more remarkable for its exuberance of forest growth, and in the matter of its simple buildings gives an impression of solidity and permanence which at that time could hardly be imputed to the other. The Commissioner's house is an affair of brick and thatch standing beneath the partial shade of trees that span the immediate neighbourhood with a luxuriant covering, of which the mingled colouring and leafy bulk stand out to great advantage when compared with any similar locality upon the Duk. About two hundred yards away, the offices; beyond these again, police lines; all the station being built haphazard, more or less, under the shelter of the forest, which is responsible for a delightful atmosphere of sylvan peacefulness that softens the accustomed crudities of line and square so rarely separated from official haunts. Most notable amongst the features of the place is a long wide glade connecting the administrative buildings with the police lines situated at its further end. Tall spreading trees, entirely foreign to the northern sector of the Ridge, line either side of that conspicuous avenue, and at the south extremity a colony of bats has settled in at least one massive hollow trunk. The odour

emanating from this source is overpowering, and permeates the neighbourhood both far and wide, though through undue familiarity with all the pungency surrounding him, the D.C. seemed to have had his nasal sensitivity severely dulled. This soul, indeed, was not a man of great perception or of a temperament appreciably affected by a matter of the kind, being a bluff and hearty scion of John Bull, untroubled by a notable discrimination and disturbed by no intense susceptibility to all the minor variations of his daily life. As a host, and as companion, his was an admirable bearing, and he was the sportsman all compleat. As administrator he possessed an outlook that perhaps displayed too marked a tendency towards the military venture for the smooth working of a district such as his, and though this district did not lend itself to unexceptional control, the state of conflict that appeared to be a feature in some parts of it would probably have been avoided, or modified at least, had the authority been vested in a less belligerent but diplomatic individual. Small "one man wars", if not invariably in progress in the region, were frequently upon the point of breaking out, according to his own report, and not so long before our meeting he had been engaged in a patrol, or expedition, in which native troops had taken part.

Digression has been made above with the sole object of explaining how individualistic is the administration of these wide and sparsely peopled areas in the south. This must inevitably be so, due to the absence of communications, and the huge zone for which one man is made responsible alone; and though co-ordination of control and the inclusion of the savage tribes within a sphere of common law and similar authority must be the final

outcome of the white man's influence, it will be many a year before that much desired end has been attained.

After about two days spent in the company of my upstanding colleague, during which period I explored the neighbourhood as far as possible, to my great satisfaction and unfailing interest, for the fine wooded "dabbas" covering it are such as never lover of the wilds could cross except in great content, I turned back north to Fadiat with a bull that had been loaned me from the government zareba at Duk Faiwal, and that I purposed to employ for baiting certain fauna which, as report from several sources showed, were paying periodic visits to the water-hole.

Since it was certainly the only source across a great expanse of plain, this water-hole was now the nightly rendezvous of every kind of game, from members of the little civet tribe to larger beasts of prey. Local report was thoroughly insistent that a troop of lions came to drink there every fourth or fifth succeeding night, although if tales could be believed they did not linger round the actual precincts of the hole, but were wont to wander all about the post in search of cattle. A short while previously a "mamur" who was visiting this post had been subjected to exceptional experience whilst he was sleeping under a mosquito net within the local rest-house. He was awakened in the middle of the night by a sensation in the nether limbs, and realising that his feet protruded far outside the net beyond the bed, imagined he had kicked the covering free in sleep and now was being bitten by mosquitos. Rearranging matters to his satisfaction he dozed off once more. He was again awakened, this time to feel a curious nibbling at his feet, and then sat up to see the shadowy form of what he took

to be a mule that he presumed had wandered from its picket post. When he kicked out at this nocturnal apparition it emitted an impressive grunt and bounded off towards the open doorway, where it remained for a brief space silhouetted up against the background of the night. The moon was shining, and in a flash he was amazed to see the outline of a lion. He leapt from bed and seizing the rifle lying handy to his side, dashed out into the courtyard in pursuit, managing to fire at the animal, although without success, for under cover of the darkness it escaped apparently unhurt into the bush.

The post is separated from the neighbouring "dabba" by about three hundred yards, and a shallow khor-bed has to be crossed to reach it. This bed is thick with clumps of elephant grass which even in February retain a semblance of their natural greenness. The "dabba" itself has been arranged by nature in the form of an irregularly shaped three-quarter circle that surrounds a crater-like depression—about one hundred and fifty yards in width—the sides of which slope gently down towards a central pond-like hole fifteen to twenty feet across the top. This hole provides the cattle at the post with water, and here also all the various fauna still inhabiting the district at this time of year foregather periodically according to their individual needs. The trees upon this "dabba" reach in depth for distances of thirty to perhaps a hundred yards; the sector furthest from the post, forming a clump not penetrable easily, is covered with a foliage largely intertwined with creepers that display a tropical exuberance both of growth and colour. Another smaller hole provides the human element with water. This has an overhanging vault-like roof, and, scooped out of sandy earth in such a fashion as to form a little cavern, cannot be easily negotiated by an animal, so that

the risk of any untoward contamination is remote.

On the night of my arrival at Duk Fadiat from Duk Faiwal I sought a point of vantage in a tree-fork situated on the inner rim of the adjacent "dabba", and overlooking all the crater with its water-holes, being thus raised about eight feet above the ground immediately beneath. One of my policemen scaled a neighbouring trunk, whence he was able to maintain subsidiary, and possibly more useful surveys of the ground than I could do, and with the prospects of the man's relief about the midnight hour the vigil started shortly after sunset, with the tethered bull some fifteen feet away.

It is a glorious night, the air is full of balm, and is so still and warm that shirt and shorts ensure the comfort of the outer man. Starlight alone illumines the nocturnal scene throughout the first few hours, but later on a full moon rises, shedding its silvery rays upon the fairy-like arena lying underneath my gaze. The irregular horizon of the tree-tops which I face stands silhouetted out against the sky, and over all the face of the mysterious forest belt that lies across the way the lovely brilliance of the night outlines a mass of leafy contouring; and on beyond this outer screen a dense obscurity of forms unseen hides all from view. The slowly fading rim of this same belt, lying in tenuous shadow on my left, sweeps round to meet the farther sector of the timbered curve, but on the other hand the moonlight in its passage through the leaves of neighbouring trees marks on the ground a clear and brilliant tracery, from which rise wooded stems reaching in well-limned definition up to bough and branch, and beams of filtering light enshroud the sylvan scene within a veil of soft and eerie beauty. Alert and motionless, I sit in poised expectancy of any chance the hours may bring, peering with

steadfast eyes across the expanse of silvered sand that separates me from the opposing cloak of gloom, now scanning restlessly the looming shadows of the bourne of trees on either side of me, now seeking penetration of the uncertain pale that limits the arena, which latter soon is bathed in an increasing light, and offers up its darker tree-screened patches to the unshaded brightness of the rising moon. . . .

Watching here in tense expectancy, that as the hours pass surrenders to a lessening vigilance induced by the serenity of night, the spirit of the wild descends upon me, and the strange silence of the forest weaves around me its impressive spell. . . .

Long ere the shining orb has mounted far into the sky, a chain of divers creatures wanders with noiseless tread to seek refreshment at the pool. Indeed the scene is yet illuminated by the gentle glimmer from a moon still hanging low on the horizon, when amidst the shadows bordering on the far perimeter of trees a dim form stirs the darkness and moves out towards the central water-hole. At first this ill-seen shape seems in the gloom like some large beast of prey, but as it pauses at the edge to take a careful survey all around before descending for a drink the outlines of a Waterbuck at length suggest themselves, and as it afterwards walks quietly away the gait peculiar to its kind no longer leaves this likelihood in any doubt.

The scene is unrelieved once more by movement or by sound, but in a little while a Bushbuck leaves the forested retreat behind to seek the pool. Yet not alone. For in its rear there follows on a family, both does and young, and as these linger on the brink others arrive upon the spot, alternately to take their own refreshment and keep careful vigil for the herd. Some gambol on the sand, others

make mock encounter all amidst the scattered throng.

This picture fading imperceptibly, the scene resumes its former guise, for one by one the creatures move toward the belt of trees, and all is still. Despite the increasing light now coming from the sky movement from every side does not at once arrest my look, for numerous lesser denizens of bush and plain at times escape my notice as they scuttle out beyond the "dabba's" wooded edge. Thus after keeping watch upon a certain spot I know is free of undergrowth and consequently gives an easy passage to all game, I turn my eyes towards the water-hole, to chance upon a single Oribi seen drinking there at ease. Later come many others, and as they venture from the gloom of trees I spy them breaking cover cautiously, and unobserved can contemplate their movement to the pool.

Throughout the night, innumerable small cat-like animals pay visits hither, creeping up singly to its edge and disappearing out of sight adown the sloping sides to water-level, and, having satisfied themselves, making away like frightened mice towards the trees. . . .

The fiendish howl of a hyæna is suddenly borne in upon the stillness of the night—to this there quickly comes an answering call. The creatures are not far away, but sounds of a demoniacal concert tell of their swift approach, and it is clear they travel to the general goal. Undoubted, also, that some monster concourse of the tribe is journeying here, for as the minutes pass the moaning notes of call and counter call, welling up strongly into cacophonies of strident sound, rends the surrounding atmosphere with an increasing volume of discordant noise. This is continued till the host of scavengers has reached the open space towards my right that breaks the circle of the wooded belt, and looking

out in this direction I can see a corresponding host of gleaming points moving like will-o'-the-wisps not far above the ground. These serried pairs of goblin eyes twinkle incessantly as the inglorious creatures harbouring them wander progressively from place to place, and as they move towards the water-hole ungainly forms are clearly lined against the moon-swept sand. They quickly spot the tethered bull, halting in meditation at the unexpected sight, and with a steady gaze those green and gleaming eyes stare curiously at this domestic specimen; but since the purpose of their visit to this place is to assuage their thirst, in twos and threes they soon surround the pool, and, like the antelope, while some descend to drink, the others wait on guard. The constant lapping of the pack is clearly heard, for other sounds do not disturb the night's tranquillity. Occasionally a false alarm is given by the sundry watchers, and with a scuttling rush the drinkers leave the pool, withdrawing hurriedly to varying distances away from it. To this in time they cautiously return, and in due course give place to others of the horde. Thus are all satisfied. Meanwhile, a number of the early comers have approached the object of their first concern, and before long a wide half-circle that betokens curious cowardice is formed around the bull. As one of these is standing just beneath my perch, I take the opportunity of hurling down upon it one of the handy store of sticks I have provided with that end in view. The effect is instant. With a lurching bound the animal makes off as if pursued by beasts of prey, and all its mates dissolve into the shroud of night, to the accompaniment of an ephemeral panic and a wild skedaddle. But after short respite the shifting ranks of glistening bead-point eyes peer yet again in this direction as they peered before, and one or two of the less craven

beasts summon sufficient courage, or enough of curiosity, to reduce to fifty yards the distance that divides them from the spot they lately fled. Here they remain, fearing a further definite advance, and as the hours proceed they fade away. . . . The moon has risen high into the heavens and a brilliant light now sets the whole locality in bold relief. There has been no movement for a while around the water-hole and it would seem the creatures of the night begin to shun the brightness of the early morning hours. But suddenly a whisper from the nearby watcher in the tree infuses into me a new activity, and scarce heard warning notes arouse me from the peaceful reverie that is diverting my attention. "Nimr, nimr,"¹—these are the words he calls in cautious undertone, pointing towards the right with outstretched arms, and though at first, scanning the ground between the tree trunks with the greatest eagerness, no sign of movement do I see, it is not long before a leopard's stealthy cat-like form lurks warily across the light and shadow underneath. Deliberately it moves towards the open, and having left the belt of wood some twenty yards behind, espies the bull which at the moment stands in peace and blissful ignorance of any threatened doom. The beast of prey comes instantly to rest, lapsing with ready ease into the common posture of domestic cats, so falling back upon its haunches as to derive support from straightened forefeet. While facing yet in the direction of its recent path, the creature's head is turned towards the bull, and as the moonlight shines upon the outlines of its slender form I see the curiously reminiscent rolling of its tongue around the whiskered jaws, for now the beast is hardly thirty yards away. I raise my rifle, draw such a bead upon the animal as can be roughly aimed,

¹ Ar. Leopard.

282 A NOMAD IN THE SOUTH SUDAN

for in the shade of trees the foresight cannot well be seen, and glancing first along the barrel's side to verify the line, I fire a round. Shot one! The leopard turns an instant somersault and paws the dust, but after laboured seconds have passed by and movement seems to cease, the beast leaps upwards with a mighty bound, charging with speed incredible towards the trees from which it came, and uttering a vicious gurgling sound that fills the air with deep reverberating growls. It crashes on into the grass beyond the "dabba" and seems to turn towards our rear, but does not travel very far, for through the short remainder of the night its intermittent groans are heard close by.

And so dawn comes. . . .

As soon as there is light enough to undertake a careful search of the vicinity without affording an advantage to the wounded animal, I amble out to make a detour of the grass that fills the dried-up "khor", and where I have a shrewd suspicion that it lies in hiding; and having reached a point of vantage enter that grass with rifle loaded and with trigger cocked. Although the reeds do not exceed three feet in height, the ground at no great distance is concealed from view, because the clumps of grass are many and lie close together. As I move cautiously ahead through all this yielding screen, a vicious rattling gurgle bursts of a sudden on the air from my right front, and simultaneously from a point not fifteen yards away the leopard charges me. I see the bounding beast as in the twinkling of an eye, teeth bared and body arched in sinuous motion low along the ground. Futile to raise my rifle for a well-aimed shot; there is just time to lower it to the level of my knees and fire point-blank. In this same flash I see the motion of the beast arrested; it is crumpling up and, as a deathly grin contorts

its features, falls with a lifeless thud not three yards from my feet. At this same juncture hoarse guffaws strike on the air a strident series of discordant notes, and I look up to see my follower Deng brandishing spear and arms in savage ecstasy and primal mirth, nor do his ribald peals of laughter lightly fade away.

A difficulty soon arises in arranging for the carcass to be carried off, owing to inhibitions that tradition has imposed upon those natives who regard the leopard as their "jadd"¹ (see page 106); eventually, however, it is moved away, and after breakfasting I settle down to preparation of the skin. It is futile to rely upon the Sudanese in matters of the sort, for the meticulous work demanded by the body skin alone involves a strain on their efficiency, while, as for the removal of the mask, this is beyond the range of their abilities.

Later in the day a large baboon appears and wanders round along the edges of the "dabba", but when I take a stroll in that direction with a view to catching nearer glimpses of its ways, it climbs out of sight into the tree-tops with remarkable agility, remains entirely motionless, it would seem, amongst the branches, and evades all efforts to discern it. Once in the forest belt, however, I push on and am rewarded with another Bushbuck.

On the night following I resume my previous perch under conditions similar to those that went before, but the hour is not so far advanced when several Oribi, drinking and playing round the pool, indulge in a precipitate rush towards the trees. No sound is heard, but in a little while a bulky shape emerges from the gloom of forest on my left, crossing the open with an easy gait that leaves me wondering what the beast can be, since the uncertain outlines of its form shade in a sandy background still unlit by

¹ Ar. Ancestor.

more than gentle light, because the moon is low. The novel visitor comes to the water's edge, but standing here awhile perceives the bull, and with a sudden leap bounds from the hole towards this new-found prize, and with that bound reveals itself a lion. But no doubt curious that the tethered animal still holds its ground the prowling hunter pauses underneath the bough that forms my seat, gazing without a move upon the figure of its shrinking prey. For me, the situation scarce could be more difficult. I dare not move, for fear of giving warning of my presence, but I must shoot, or else the luckless bull will go to certain death. The lion's head and shoulders are all that I can see and into the heart of this I fire an ill-directed round. Recovering from the blinding flash I know the worst has intervened, and from the sound of crashing through the neighbouring undergrowth I suspect a golden opportunity has slipped away. Still, I remain motionless, fondly hoping for the beast's return deterred by no suspicions of my lurking presence, and after a short delay the creature comes. This time a mate appears as well, and through the shadows in my rear their grimly stalking forms are outlined clear against the background of the soil. Now they circle underneath the trees unseen, but never the faintest rustle comes to indicate the paths they take, and only infrequent glimpses still assure me of their lingering presence. At last the female follows closely on behind the male, it may be ten yards off from where I perch, and prowling stealthily towards the bull. I now select the male and fire again. There is a grunt, but ere my eyes are reaccustomed to the darkness all around I hear the animals crash off into the grass along the far side of the belt of trees. Throughout the night low growls tell of the wounded lion lying, perhaps, two hundred yards away, and the emission of loud roars at intervals,

coupled with tell-tale howls from an indefinite hyæna company, paints in an image on the mind another tragic scene of nature in the wilds.

Noted above all for the stupendous power of their jaws, hyænas will collectively attack a wounded animal, or one infirm, and though on this occasion they were kept from launching an assault upon the victim owing to the lioness's presence, there is no doubt whatever that, as later evidenced by paw-marks on its back, the male had been severely mauled by these inquisitors throughout the night.

In this connection let me now recount an incident that once befell a colleague whilst on "safaria". Travelling through the bush he suddenly became aware of distant howling from hyænas, and as this was a most unusual feature for the time of day he moved in the direction of the sound. As he progressed the far-off clamour gradually developed into an unearthly din, and in a little while he came upon a number of these beasts gathered around a talc tree, with their heads directed towards its boughs. Looking up himself, he saw an aged lion crouching on a lower fork; it had evidently taken refuge there by jumping up beyond the reach of its pursuers. He shot the animal, whereupon the others made off rapidly to cover, and coming up to seek his trophy he discovered it was absolutely toothless. In that state it could only be a ready prey to any of its enemy with instinct or intelligence enough to gather its predicament; time only could postpone, but could not save it from its quite inevitable doom.

On the morning following my second night's vigil I went out to find the wounded lion and discovered him half hidden by long grass about a quarter of a mile from where he had been shot. Deserted by his mate, and hampered in his movements so that he could hardly walk, his merciful despatch was simply

done. There was again some trouble when it came to carrying off the carcass, for the reason previously given, but this being overcome in course of time I could then concentrate upon the accustomed bout of taxidermy which had been imposed on me in virtue of my rôle of Nimrod and the natives' lack of skill. . . .

It was now time to take leave of Duk Fadiat, but having learnt of the existence of a herd of buffalo in the waste regions to the north-west, I decided to return to Ayod by a route that should include these areas in a devious itinerary. So once again I left the Ridge to lose myself amidst the devastation of the plains that border on the river, following a native path that led through bush in which were sundry villages deserted for the "khors", and so into the parched vacuities of the unwatered spaces yet unknown to me, and with little in their aspect to distinguish them from other regions further north. A few "marahs" here and there, a few friendly greetings, a fruitless chase after a marauding cattle thief, and a long monotony of marching hours. Then to a "marah" where the Nuers reported that the grazing ground of a large herd of buffalo lay close at hand. This was some three days after leaving Fadiat, and here again I pitched my camp, although the morning was not far advanced. Setting out with native guides I came in about an hour's time to the edges of a locality covered by tall reed-grass which, though dried and parched by sun, gave moderate cover from a stalker's point of view. Two or three hundred yards away a large herd of buffalo was grazing undisturbed, and though from time to time many became obscured from view by clumps and intervening stems, a careful observation of their movements was not difficult; so I manoeuvred into a position lying to a flank of their advancing line, and waited till a suitable occasion should present itself for the selection of a head.

Fortune, however, did not favour me in this endeavour, for a cow wandered from the herd reaching within some fifty yards of my position, and since she must at length discover me and would alarm the other animals, I felt compelled to take at once such lesser gift as gods of chance had now bestowed. No sooner had the shot been fired than about half a dozen bulls came sniffing up towards the dying beast, and then as if impelled by curiosity began to move in my direction cautiously, frequently halting, pawing the ground and snorting at the unseen source of this intrusion. Still motionless, for by this time I was in view of the approaching herd, and could but hope to screen myself as part of the surrounding grass, I fired again, yet though my shot went home it touched no vital part and, making a volte-face, away the whole herd galloped with a thud of hoofs. All later efforts to come up with them seemed doomed to failure, and with the wounded creature in their midst they quickly passed from sight.

A most unsatisfactory situation, largely due to my impetuosity at the first encounter.

Later, the warlike scenes associated with partition of a carcass into spoils for hordes of jabbering savages were again enacted, but with the head secure I did not linger on the scene, allowing all the rites of a most barbarous apportionment to follow their allotted course unseen by me.

Upon the morrow I turned eastward to the Duk, reaching headquarters after uneventful travel. At Ayod I was received with intimations of an incident that had occurred while I was absent. A small party of police, journeying south from Khor Atar towards the Ridge, had come upon a lion suddenly, and one of them, defying all authority and definite instruction, started forthwith to fire at the beast an ill-timed round that, far from then and there ensuring its

despatch, served only to infuriate it with an ineffective wound. Although the animal was at the moment making off to cover, it turned immediately and charged at its unready persecutor, who in a trice was being mauled upon the ground. His comrades opened up a heavy fusilade upon the animal that proved effective, though not before the hapless man had been reduced to a most serious state. But he was taken back to Khor Atar and sent to hospital at Malakal, eventually recovering from his wounds.

A summons from the Governor awaited me, and by arrangement I was now to meet his steamer on the upper reaches of the river. So in due course I found myself upon the banks of that deserted waterway, arriving one evening in time to share with him and his devoted spouse an excellent and relishable little meal. Upon the morrow that distinctive vassal of the government, the chief of Khandak, whose "marah" was normally established at this point, was once again presented to the Governor, and he caused the latter no small irritation when by taking full advantage of the general air of cheerfulness surrounding the proceedings he submitted a demand for a young bull, claiming the same in recognition of his recent services to the administration. This submission I was able to substantiate, and the animal, selected from amongst the number being taken back to Malakal, was duly handed over to this opportunist chief.

I went on this occasion for a short steam up-river with the Governor. During the afternoon we saw Roan antelope, and the boat was drawn in alongside the bank some distance further on. No sooner had we landed, pushing through the reeds that line the water's edge, than an unusual sight confronted us. Close by, a python lay upon the ground, and, firmly compassed by the serpent's coils, was a large monitor,

a kind of water-lizard very common in the region. Neither creature stirred, the former being in a state of absolute constriction, and the latter powerless to move. We went up to the strange phenomenon and could not readily distinguish the constrictor's head from the remainder of its body, but after finding the position of its tail eventually succeeded in locating what we sought; and this lay hidden on the ground beneath a mass of shining coils. Although I bent low over the triangular-shaped skull, the creature still remained indifferent, and was inert and motionless. A .22 rifle soon despatched the python and relaxed the tension on its captive; and when the imprisoned lizard struggled from its coils there came to view a reptile three feet long, covered with scales of greenish yellow hue, which made precipitately off into the water down the river bank, seemingly none the worse for its encounter.

Returning after dark with a supply of fresh meat, borne in triumphantly upon the shoulders of a heavy laden band of "baharis",¹ we returned by night to the point of our departure that same morning, and on the morrow I was left in virtual solitude, to pursue awhile the claims of local government amidst the arid wilds that still remained for me a spacious home.

¹ Ar. sailors.

CHAPTER XIII

LAST DAYS

As if in natural sequence with the excessive drought of the past season, the advent of the first spring rains was this year stayed beyond the normal time, and the great plains of the Zeraf, hardened through many a month of torrid visitation, did not become impassable until the closing days of May—a situation that was both exceptional and not without some benefit to the administration, for it prolonged the opportunities for “safaria” during a period which in the normal course involved considerable uncertainty of travel owing to chances of climatic interference with one’s scheduled plans.

Towards the end of April I set out from Ayod on my final journey, making down towards the river with a view to meeting the “Shabluka” and then visiting the various “marahs” all along the western bank of the Zeraf, a territory as yet unvisited by me through force of circumstance, and the more pressing calls upon my time elsewhere. Following a native track by which I had not travelled previously, my party moved all day across the plain, which was relieved in places by a stretch of open bush, though quite devoid of any sign of human habitation; but when darkness fell upon us in the midst of such a desolation we were forced to sojourn for the night beneath the canopy of heaven—a precarious matter at this time of year owing to the fickle skies of spring. And so again the following day into a region closely knit with thicker

bush, now marching waterless towards the native centre where I hoped to pass the night. Such in the early hours of the afternoon came into view, but all the huts were strewn across an area wide enough to house a large and populous community of civilised inhabitants, with the result that a good half-hour's march from one extremity of this great scattering of primitive domains was necessary before a local guide had brought us to the farther portion of the village where we spent the night. In the meantime rain commenced to fall, and it was certainly a dismal little band that later plodded in to find the shelter that awaited them at the conclusion of their trek.

In the course of the night one of my mules died, and it became necessary early on the morrow to press porters into the "government service", more especially as others of the mules were also ailing and required a lightening of their loads. This practice does occasionally become essential in the event of untoward occurrences, but happily not often, for there is little that the Nuer more detests than carrying loads of any kind, while naturally his aversions are increased when forced to travel over waterless and arid countrysides.

During the next day's "safaria" we struck the telephone line between Awoi and the Zeraf, and after some hours of further journeying were much relieved to reach the river. That evening yet another of my mules expired, but as the steamer was at hand the fact imposed no further strain upon resources that had now grown very slender.

And now once more I find myself a passenger upon the ancient "Shabbyloo"—that comfortable guerdon of a D.C.'s peace. I journey south as far as navigation will allow, and then return by gentle stages, gathering tribute all along the western bank from "shens" residing at their "marahs" near the river's edge.

And so, with crowded lower decks bearing some numbers of the leanish kine which graze across these withered plains, my boat soon joins the muddy waterway that in a little while will bring me back again to Malakal. . . .

As I look back in happy retrospect upon the varying scenes that filled my service in some little known and unfrequented corners of the vast Sudan, and see afresh the various incidents that in a time now past once marked a rich variety of daily life, I muse upon the many opportunities which, lost or taken, lay in a spacious field of wide but ill-fulfilled endeavour. And on the shifting background formed by countless episodes in that short interlude, the clearest figures stand revealed as my police, who, in the times of frequent stress and rarer quietude, were to a man the restless servants of their master's will. Cheerful by nature, these in the trough of a depression, likely engendered by some hard mischance, were always wont to give a quick response to his encouragement, and with unflinching zeal and aptitude to minister with all their power towards his every need. How can I speak in worthy praise of that "Shawish", Sabah El Khair, who in a host of diverse duties, great and small, was to be relied upon for faithful, unremitting work, performed with a good heart and beaming countenance, whatever was the task? Or of those lesser figures whom I knew so personally in sunshine and in storm? Simple as children, weak as men, their like still serve the unsuspected purpose of an unknown Lord.

INDEX

A

- Abu Sa'id, 239, 244
Abwong, 74, 75, 76
Abyssinia, 69, 80, 81, 100, 107
Arabs, 9, 19, 35, 39, 45, 85, 87,
89, 91, 238, 245
Ariel, 237
Assouan, 25
Awoi, 153, 265, 266
Ayod, 104, 120, 137, 150, 151,
153

B

- Baboon, 283
Bahr el Jebel, 66, 110
Bahr el Zeraf, 66, 68, 70, 72,
104, 214, 219, 290
Bang, 259
Bats, 157
Bees, 189, 190
Belgian Congo, 28
Berbers, 9, 19
Big Game, 70, 109, 122, 141
Bird Life, 44, 71
Blue Nile, 11, 30, 35, 232, 233,
235, 249
Blue Nile Province, 91
Bor, 273
British Barracks, 13
Buffalo, 250, 286
Bush Buck, 142, 278, 283

C

- Cairo, 19
Camels, 204, 228
Canoes, Native, 63
Capato, Angelo, 16, 251
Cattle, 173, 181
Civets, 279
Civil Secretary, Khartoum, 21,
22, 232, 251
Cooks, Native, 21, 149, 270
Cotton Plantations, 102, 223
Cotton Soil Plains, 187
Crocodiles, 41
Crows, 145
Cyprus, 231

D

- Dabbas, 138, 139, 272, 273
Deng, 134, 265, 283
Dialects, Native, 22
Dinkas, 71, 119, 124, 131, 134,
188, 199, 201, 273
District Commissioners, 10, 20,
65, 73, 76, 100, 172, 176, 178,
234, 255, 274
Doctors, 74, 178, 179, 184, 192,
223, 251
Dom Palms, 138, 139, 144
Donkeys, 235
Duck, Wild, 184, 239
Duiker, 142, 203

Duk Ayod, 104, 120, 137, 150,
151, 153
Duk Fadiat, 272, 275
Duk Faiwal, 272, 275
Duk Ridge, The, 135, 137
Duke of Connaught, 67
Dura, 92, 112, 204, 235, 264
Dwal Diu, 162, 203, 255, 257,
258

E

Egrets, 41
Egyptian Officials, 55
El Dueim, 32, 33
Elephants, 107, 239, 245
El Obeid, 36, 38

F

Fadiat, Duk, 272, 275
Faiwal, Duk, 272, 275
Fangak, 71, 196
Faragallah Buluk Amin, 267
Fashoda, 48
Fire Arms, 107, 241, 289
Fishing, 109, 166, 215, 224, 259
Foreign Secty., British Govt., 19
Forest Camps, 121, 123, 130,
131, 146, 188, 195, 247
Frost, 130
Fula Gaweir, 183, 256
Fulas, 120, 125, 129
Fung Province, 231

G

Gardens, 75, 205
Garjoks, 255
Gaweir, 105, 115, 153, 176, 183,
184
Gazelle, 127
Gebelein, 39

G.P.O. Khartoum, 12
Gezira, The, 232
Giant Eland, 202
Giraffe, 197
Gordon College, 15, 18
Governor, Fung Province, 247
Governor-General, 12, 18
Governor, U.N.P., 81, 95, 199,
222, 288
Grand Hotel, Khartoum, 12
Grass, 128, 187
Great Bear, The, 200
Greek Merchants, 16, 59
Gwerkwaw, 203, 206, 213, 214

H

Hamlas, 187, 193
Heglig, 111, 118
Hippopotami, 42, 215
Hôsh, 90
Hospitals, 60
Hubboob, 226
Hyænas, 127, 147, 279, 285

I

Interpreters, Native, 23, 154,
169, 181, 260, 270
Irrigation Officials, 60, 199, 201
Islamic Religion, 194

J

Jadds, Native, 106, 283
Jebel Auliya, 32
Jebel Dali, 236
Justice, Administration of, 64,
78, 87, 115, 119, 172, 176,
180, 248, 270, 274

K

Kaka, 45
 Kenya Colony, 223
 Khalla, 213, 215
 Khamis Effendi, 170, 205
 Khandak, 135, 183
 Khartoum, 9, 11, 231, 251
 Khartoum North, 73
 Kharubs, 111
 Khor Agalin, 238, 239, 247
 Khor Atar, 117, 119, 121, 123,
 132, 134, 170, 197, 256
 Khors, 66, 109, 110, 208
 Kitchener, 48
 Kittur Bush, 236
 Kodok, 48, 84, 85
 Kost, 35, 36, 38, 231, 253
 Kujurs, 162, 257

L

Lake No, 67, 223, 224
 Lau, 74, 184
 Lemons, 159
 Leopards, 141, 148, 246, 271, 281
 Lions, 125, 273, 284, 285, 287
 Lizards, 157, 288
 Luxor, 25

M

Makwar, 232
 Malakal, 25, 49, 50, 75, 95, 117,
 165, 234, 255
 Malaria, 124, 213
 Mamurias, 46, 49
 Mamurs, 46, 69, 86, 92, 182, 238
 Marabout, 145, 188
 Marahs, 163, 208, 211
 Marchand, 48
 Marriage Customs, Nuer, 106,
 173
 Meetings with Sheikhs, 146, 178,
 182, 203, 212, 257, 288
 Mek, The, 48, 84, 170

Melut, 46, 48, 86, 87
 Milk, 160
 Missions, 46, 52, 76, 79
 Mokhaznis, 88
 Mongalla, 26, 104, 138, 272
 Monkeys, 250
 Morhig, 17
 Mosquitos, 77
 Motors, 70, 233
 Mounted Police, 86, 237
 Mrs. Gray's Waterbuck, 220

N

Nasser, 76, 78, 79
 Navigation, Nile, 29
 Nuba Mts. Province, 45, 69
 Nuers, 74, 76, 105, 106, 119, 173,
 180, 210, etc.

O

Omdurman, 14, 18
 Onbashi, 122
 Oribi, 142, 203, 279
 Orion, 39

P

Pack Artillery, 18
 Police, 117, 118, 144, 152, 153,
 194, 214, 219, 292
 Porters, Native, 291
 Prisoners, Savage, 78
 Province Engineers, 20, 94, 165,
 168, 223, 248
 Province Steamers, 62, 165,
 196, 198, 214, 225, 288, 291
 Province Store, 59, 117

R

Railways, 38, 232
 Rains, The, 70, 214, 225, 228,
 256

Reed Buck, 193
 Rejaf, 13, 29
 Renk, 40, 66, 84, 91, 94
 River Navigation, 29
 Roads, 61, 69, 170, 183
 Roan Antelope, 129, 201, 202
 207, 288
 Roseires, 234, 238
 Rufshendol, 263, 265

S

Sabah el Khair, 182, 206, 257,
 292
 Safaria, 165, 175, 182, 206, 213
 Sagh, The, 56, 87, 95, 96, 97,
 99, 167
 Senior Commissioner, The, 185
 Sennar, 35, 231, 232, 233
 Shamadan, 198
 Shawish, 152, 182
 Shen Kerfail, 178, 184, 257
 Shens, 108, 112, 113, 115
 Sheroot Flies, 192
 Shilluks, 48, 71, 84, 106, 167
 Shooting Parties, 99, 252, 253
 Singa, 231, 234, 235, 247, 251
 Sirdar, The, 11
 Snakes, 256, 288
 Sobat, The, 69, 70, 73, 79, 81,
 104, 117, 255
 Sobat-Pibor Military Enclave,
 100
 Sôl, The, 118, 120, 199
 Sommering's Gazelle, 237
 Southern Cross, 38, 200
 Stack, Sir Lee, 16
 Stigand, Major, 244
 Sudan Club, The, 13
 Sudan Defence Force, The, 10, 18
 Sudan Govt., 10
 Sudd, The, 67, 110, 224
 Sunburn, 124

T

Talc, 111
 Talodi, 45, 69
 Taufikia, 67, 69, 119
 Taxes, 76, 108, 163, 176, 223,
 231, 235, 264
 Taxidermy, 283, 286
 Telegraphs, 67
 Telephones, 119, 153, 265
 Termites, 157
 Tiang, 127, 207
 Tonga, 66, 69, 70, 101, 225
 Tribute, 76, 108, 163, 176, 223,
 231, 235, 264
 Tukls, 90, 112

U

Upper Nile, The, 13, 44, 48, 119
 Upper Nile Province, 73, 76,
 92, 186, 202, 272

V

Vaccination, 74, 75, 184
 Veterinary Surgeons, 178, 222,
 234

W

War Office, Khartoum, 12
 Warriors, Native, 107, 167
 Waterbuck, 71, 127, 219, 278
 Waterholes, 142, 276
 Water Skins, 195
 White-eared Cob, 221
 White Nile, 11, 14, 30, 104, 233
 White Nile Province, 31, 32, 40
 Wild Dogs, 272
 Wood Stations, 33

Z

Zeers, 155
 Zeraf, The 66, 68, 70, 72, 104,
 214, 219, 290
 Zoo, Khartoum, 12