

THE LAND OF THE FALSE PROPHECY

Their warlike disposition is nurtured by the frequent feuds between neighboring tribes, generally arising about water and the theft of cattle. The unwritten law of the desert forbids any settlements around the wells, which are common to all. But two parties arrive at the same well at a well which is insufficient for both. A dispute arises as to precedence; a blow is struck and a man is killed. The murderer flees to his tribe and sends for the price of blood; for the avenger of blood as practised by the ancient Arabs exists in full force; except that there are no "cities of refuge." If the price of the dead refuse compensation, the murderer begins, and it may last for years, and ends by one side demanding reparation by the other. Hence it is that when peace prevails in the desert, two parties meet, both halt and send a man or two to reconnoiter and ascertain if there is blood between them. When a caravan arrives unexpectedly in the neighborhood of a Bedouin camp, the impulse of the natives is to vanish instantly, especially if soldiers are seen among the new-comers. The sheep and camels, driven off by the women and children, disappear in a twinkling beyond the next ridge. Having no other encumbrances than a few skins and gourds, their migrations are exceedingly prompt and easy. The tents and other baggage are loaded upon camels, and in a few minutes a whole encampment disappears. After this precaution is taken, one or two men return, and when they have ascertained the peaceful intentions of the strangers, the others approach to trade and to learn news, of which they are very greedy. They are all Mohammedans, but their mode of life prevents their giving much attention to the minor practices of their religion. Their women are much more free than those who live in settled habitations, and in some of the tribes this freedom is carried to the most extreme degree, while in others great strictness prevails. The customs of marriage and divorce differ but little from those prevailing in all Moslem countries. The Bedouins always go bare-headed, even in the fiercest heat of summer, and, strange to say, some tribes, like the Beggaras, wear their heads. The Ababdehs twist their hair into plaits the size of a quill, and the Bishareens comb all the hair from the forehead to the crown of the head straight up to the height of five or six inches, the rest hanging in braids nearly down to the shoulders. They wear their heads with a turban and camel's hair, or any other grass they can procure, letting it trickle down upon their faces and shoulders. The tribes distinguished also by the form and position of gashes cut in the cheeks in infancy. The Beggaras who inhabit the Kordofan, near the Nile, are very warlike, and when beyond the reach of Egyptian garrisons are addicted to brigandage. They possess great numbers of splendid oxen, mounted upon which both men and women, riding abreast, and all armed with four or five spears, come in hundreds to the market at Obeid. The great sheikhs of all the tribes usually wear the turbans and robes of the Egyptians, but the common people are satisfied with a few bits of cotton around the waist, and sandals upon their feet. The Bedouins have a strong feeling of personal dignity, and are quick to resent insults. Duels of a peculiar kind are not uncommon, always supervised by the sheikhs of the tribe, who never permit a man to come to a fatal termination. Sometimes the two adversaries, separated by two parallel ropes about a yard apart, are armed with courbashes (a fearful whip, made of hippopotamus hide, which brings the blood with every cut), they are encouraged to slash each other until their wrath is cooled. In serious cases the combatants are led flat on the ground, face to face, as close as they can get. One single blow is given to the one who wins the duel, after which he passes it to his adversary, who strikes the second blow, so on alternately. They are forbidden to strike at a vital part, and while slashing each other's arms, legs, hands, and shoulders,—not without a show of chivalrous courtesy, the judges of the combat watch each stroke that is struck, and when in their opinion enough has been shed, they rise and separate the adversaries, who proclaim themselves satisfied, and return quietly to their tents to have their wounds healed.

A brief sketch of the foremost Bedouin chief of the Sudan will illustrate the character of those tribes. Mohammed bin Khalifa the great chief of the Bedouins and Bishareens, is the patriarchal yet almost absolute ruler of over thirty thousand people. His ancestors were princes for generations perhaps before the days of the Prophet. He is now at sixty years of age, nearly six feet tall, and of dignified presence. His hair is dark chocolate. He has excellent features, large black eyes, curved nose, thin lips, and a fine beard. He is extremely wealthy in silver and jewels and precious arms, camels, horses, and slaves. The Khedive requires him to reside on the banks of the Nile where he possesses a princely estate of rich alluvial lands, at El Hoar, Berber. He is held responsible for the security of trade and travel through the eastern deserts, and receives a large salary upon the moneys paid his people by caravans, carriers, and camel-drivers; and one of the privileges claimed by him that no one—not even government officials—shall pass through their territory without hiring them and their

camels. He escorted me for seven months in my exploration of his territory, having with him ten or twelve hundred camels, a large retinue, and five or six large tents furnished for his accommodation. Whenever we came across encampments of his people, they hastened to do him homage as their prince, kissing his hand and the hem of his garment, and submitting their suits for his decision; while he, seated under a tree or at his tent door, administered justice precisely as the kings of Israel are described as doing; and no king or emperor could have a more noble and commanding manner. His father was the Sheikh Kralif. When the Mamlooks were exterminated by Mohammed Ali, in 1811, those that escaped the massacre fled to the deserts, and Kralif gave them refuge and hospitality; and when the dreaded Ibrahim Pasha followed in pursuit, Kralif alone was bold enough to avow what he had done, and to vindicate his course. Soon afterward he was murdered by a Turkish governor, and was succeeded by his brother Baraca. The latter waited for an opportunity, and retaliated by assassinating the Turk, and some years later he was murdered by the latter's relatives. Mohammed Khalifa succeeded his uncle, and took up the avenging of blood, and the vendetta did not cease until one or two of the Turks had been killed, and the rest fled the country. When, after seven months' wanderings through the eastern deserts, he gave a great feast at his residence to the entire expedition. Many sheep were slaughtered and numberless fowls. The officers had their banquet apart, fifty or more dishes, in the Arab fashion, a sheep roasted whole crowning the feast. The soldiers, camel-drivers, and servants all had theirs seated on the ground and attended by the sheikh's slaves. He, with a courtesy and grace that any prince might envy, commencing with us, went from group to group, breaking bread and eating just one mouthful with each, accompanying the act with some graceful oriental compliment. He reminded me of Abraham, only he is a much more powerful sheikh than Abraham ever was. He has remained faithful in his allegiance to the Khedive, and he is the present Mudeer of Dongola, so often mentioned in the dispatches. He has been made a pasha and decorated with the order of the Osmanieh, and is spoken of as the future Governor-General of the Soudan. His alliance is worth as much as an army to the British.

When I was in the Soudan the Mahdi was in obscurity, secluded in a cave in the island of Aba, above Duem, transforming himself into a prophet by meditation, prayer, and pretended visions and revelations. What is most striking about him is his pertinacity and his power of holding his followers in spite of defeat. It is nearly four years since he first raised the standard of revolt, and during that time he has suffered nine or ten serious defeats, with barely an equal number of successes. After every defeat he has returned to the attack stronger than before. Three times he was repulsed with heavy losses while besieging El Obeid, but he finally captured it. Hicks Pasha inflicted a terrible defeat upon him, but he subsequently destroyed Hicks Pasha and his entire army. It would be a dangerous mistake to suppose that his power is broken. His inaction during the summer is explained by the fact that his followers, many of whom live in Kordofan, had to go home to plant and secure the scanty crop of doka (an inferior kind of doura which is the only grain that matures during the brief rainy season from June 15th to September 15th), on which their families depend for the next year. Like all commanders of barbarians, who have no regular commissariat, he may have only a couple of thousand men with him to-day and fifty thousand next month. It is certain that he had fully that number or more when he exterminated Hicks Pasha. If all the Bedouin tribes and the people from Kordofan to Dongola were to unite under his flag, he could muster more than a hundred thousand men. But this is not to be expected, and the British, profiting by the division existing among the tribes, may secure some more or less valuable allies whose fidelity will depend entirely upon success. But in any case the Mahdi is not a toe to be despised.

El Obeid is the present centre of his power. I was forced to remain there for six months, having been disabled in the deserts by insolation produced by excessive heat, and I was transported back to Suakim in the winter, nearly a thousand miles across two deserts, in a litter swung between two camels; but during my convalescence I had time and opportunity to observe everything worthy of note in El Obeid. This city is about four hundred miles from the Nile, two hundred of which are through desolate a'moors. It is built on an immense plain, studded with enormous baobabs, which always grow singly one or two hundred yards apart. It is a place of fifteen or twenty thousand inhabitants, almost hidden in thickets of hoglaks and mimosas, which give it a pleasing appearance from a distance. There are a few substantial, well-built houses belonging to Greek and Egyptian merchants. The telegraph, on iron posts brought from England, connecting it with Khartoum and Cairo, was completed while I was there; and before three days, such is the civilizing influence of commerce, the local traders were using it to ascertain the quotations of gum arabic and ostrich feathers at Cairo and Alexandria. The native dwellings are generally circular, with an earthen wall four or five feet high, surmounted with a conical roof made of doka stalks in regular layers, and quite rain-proof. These

habitations, called *halls*, about twenty feet in diameter, are comfortable enough. A slender pole projects several feet above the roof, and when ornamented with a glass bottle between two ostrich feathers is considered the height of civilized luxury. Each family possesses a sufficient number of these *halls* for its use, and the group is surrounded with a thorn-hedge. This enclosure, shaded by hoglaks, is often planted as a vegetable garden. The sights of the natives seated around their dwellings at sundown, the men chatting and smoking, the women attending to household duties, and the children playing and rolling about in primitive *sakkid*, is both curious and picturesque. The market of El Obeid is held daily on a spacious square in front of the Governor's quarters—the main building of which, now the Mahdi's residence, is three hundred feet front with a large square tower in the centre. Some three or four thousand people come to this market from the surrounding villages. Cattle, horses, camels, sheep, grain, and the identical peanut of Virginia and Carolina are the staples of trade. Near by are covered bazaars containing European goods, and also large warehouses full of gum arabic, hides, and ostrich feathers.

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

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

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

Pretty Much the Same Thing After All.

"Father," he said, as he came running in from school, "did you ever drill an oil well and make \$50,000?"

"No, my son, I never did."

"I was in hopes that you had, for I wanted to brag to the boys."

"Well, you can tell 'em that' although I never drilled an oil well and made \$50,000, an oil broker once drilled me and made \$75,000, which is about the same thing, I guess."

All His Troubles Ahead of Him.

Three year old to crying baby:

"Y' a fink y' a're yots of trouble, don't you, baby?"

"Hu-wah—hu-wah—hu-wah!" replied the baby.

"Well, y' uis wait till y' u' dit bit 'nuff to dit a god 'paikin' ones, an' 'en y' u' u'll know what trouble is."

The London *Sportsman*, of Feb. 11, contained the following advertisement: "Wanted—A cultured gentleman, capable of milking goats. A university man preferred. Application, with testimonials as to proficiency, to be addressed, etc."

The Open Fire-Place.

The popular movement that favors a return to the comforts of the roomy houses of the olden time has not only produced ample windows and airy halls, huge mantel-pieces, stateliest clocks and round tables, but great chimneys and open fire-places, such as our grandfathers enjoyed on winter evenings when the forests were the only supply of fuel.

When coal began to be cheaper than wood, the open fire-place and great mantel-pieces almost disappeared. It is now found that coal may so be used in open grates as to give to the room the old time cheerfulness and glow. It has also been discovered of late that the same grate may be made to answer for two rooms, without an extra supply of fuel. A practical reporter thus writes on the subject for his paper:

"I think the time is coming," said a builder, "when houses will be furnished with more grates and open fire-places than they are to-day. Of late years everything has been running to hot-air furnaces and steam-heating apparatus, and the system of warming flats has been reduced to a science.

"But only those who have been brought up in the country can realize the charm of the big, wide fireplace, with its crackling back-logs and its bed of red-hot embers, that form themselves into so many fantastic shapes to fascinate the family gathered round.

"Did you ever notice how earnestly people gaze into a good fire? What do they see there, what thoughts does the fire suggest, that all who gather around it sooner or later find themselves staring vacantly at it, oblivious to all surroundings?

"What good cheer does it cast over the household to see the unsteady flicker of the flame, and watch the dancing shadows on the floor! What is more consoling than to blow out the lamp, or turn out the gas, and sit by the firelight alone, with one's heels perched upon the fender? There's little of that in the city, but I believe there's going to be more of it—not open fire-places, but grates.

A way down South, where they don't need much fire at any season, a man has invented a grate that heats two rooms at once with one fire. It ought to have been done before, everybody will say, and many of us builders wonder why we didn't think of it ourselves.

"The whole thing consists of setting a peculiarly constructed grate clear through the chimney, so that the front is in one room and the back in another. Of course, one fire will heat both rooms. Simple! And yet it has just been patented. I'm afraid we are getting slow."

The Mission of the Mahdi.

The term "Mahdi" is approximately translated "Messiah." The Mahdi's Heaven-imposed mission is neither national nor political, but religious. The territory which he claims and the people whose allegiance he demands are limited solely by his geographical ignorance. Either he is the looked-for spiritual head of the whole world, who is to unite all nations under an Islam purified of its existing abuses, or he is nothing. He is either the Messiah which was to come or an imposter. Avoiding a most exact parallel which might seem irreverent, an attempt to negotiate with such a leader might be compared to an offer made by the Mohammedan leader to Peter the Hermit of the crowd of the Franks if he would refrain from prosecuting the Crusades.

The Mahdi's aims, repeated in innumerable proclamations, are to drive those who refuse to recognize his divine mission into the sea, to be proclaimed in the holy city of Mecca, and to destroy the false Caliphate at Stamboul. He is equally hostile to the Senoussi, the Sultan, Arabi, and Mr. Blunt. His only adherents are those who will take the sword and kill all who refuse his faith throughout the world. He is the successor of numerous impostors who, not having the fortune to be opposed by British statesmen, have failed to achieve equal prestige. Defeat alone can destroy that prestige.

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