

other country in the world. The great strength of the solar rays during the summer months—when the disease is worse—the clouds of fine dust brought down by the hot winds, and the neglect of cleanliness have all been variously assigned as the cause of this distemper; but the first two at least of these surmises are negatived by the facts that in Upper Egypt and Nubia, where the heat is much greater, the affection is very rare; and that in the desert where the *khamsein* dust equally abounds, it is altogether unknown. Fortunately, this native scourge seldom attacks Europeans, and when it does a few applications of sulphate of zinc will suffice to check and cure it. The vegetable diet of the fellaheen renders *dysentery*—following diarrhoea—another common, and at certain seasons destructive malady, but from this again ordinary dietetic care effectually preserves foreigners. Several varieties of *skin disease*, including leprosy—which appears, however, to be dying out in Egypt, though still very prevalent in its worst type in Crete—are also common amongst the natives; but these, too, rarely or never affect Europeans, and need not be feared by either foreign residents or tourists. The great extension of hospital accommodation in Cairo and Alexandria within recent years has sensibly mitigated the effect of these endemic disorders, and as the sanitary administration further improves, a corresponding reduction of the national death-rate may be reasonably expected. Even as it is, Egypt, we have seen, compares favourably with the healthiest countries of Europe, and as a resort for foreign invalids offers climatic attractions which a consensus of medical opinion declares to be unique.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SOUDAN.

Its Geographical Area—Dongola—Berbera—Taka—Shendy and Halfé—Sennaar—Khartoum—Kordofan—Darfour—The Shillook Country—Darfertit and Donga—Sir S. Baker's Expedition—Colonel Gordon—Successful Results of his First Expedition—His new Commission as Governor-General—Expressed Determination to Extinguish the Slave Trade—The Opposing Difficulties—Antiquity and Wide-spread Sources of the Traffic—Trade of the Soudan—Its Export Routes—Development that may be Expected with Improved Communications—Results already Achieved—The Khedive's Claim on European Confidence.

IN Western geography Nigritia, or the Country of the Blacks, comprises the great expanse of eastern Africa between Nubia and the Equator, and westwards anywhere beyond Lake Tchad to the Niger. But the Egyptian Soudan, though covering nearly the whole of this area southward, is bounded westwards by Darfour, extending on the east to the Red Sea, and thence down past Souakim and Massowah, overlapping Abyssinia, to Berbera and Harrar.

Of the great group of provinces thus collectively named, Dongola, the first, is one of the finest; for while its southern districts are within the zone of the annual rains, it is abundantly watered northwards by the overflow of the Nile over an area of nearly fifteen miles, known as the Wady-Jaijar, or great Dongolese plain. Some miles above Old Dongola, the former capital of the province, the river sweeps round to the north-east, and makes what is called the Great Bend, enclosing northward the fine peninsula savannah mis-named in our maps

the desert of Bahiuda, peopled by the Hussaneeya, Esoo-Arab, Fadneah, and Omeah Bedoween, who rear large flocks of sheep, goats, and camels, and after the rains cultivate considerable tracts of land. In the course of this great curve of nearly 400 miles, the Fourth and Fifth Cataracts are passed, and in lat. $17^{\circ} 37' N.$, in the country of the Berbers, which is also a province of great industrial capabilities, the Nile receives the Taccazé, or Atbara, its largest and last affluent hence to the Mediterranean. From this point northwards, for more than 1,400 miles, not even a rivulet swells the volume of the great stream—"an unexampled instance," says Humboldt, "in the hydrographic history of the world." During this long course it is exposed to the evaporation of a burning sun, drawn off into a thousand canals, absorbed by porous banks and thirsty sands, drunk of by every living thing, and yet, strange to say, it pours into the sea a larger volume than it displays between the Cataracts a thousand miles away.

South-east of Berber lies the fine province of Taka, one of the most fertile portions of Egyptian territory anywhere east of the Nile. It is cultivated throughout, and from Kassala, its chief town, carries on through Souakim a considerable trade with Djeddah and the Hedjaz.

The Atbara gives its name to the extensive tract included within the eastern basin of that river and the fork formed by its junction with the Nile. This includes the provinces of Shendy and Halfé (the ancient Meroë), both of which consist of well-watered table-lands, broken by low ranges of hills, and still rich, now as of yore, in the elements of great material prosperity. Shendy, the chief town of the double province, derives importance from its situation on the caravan route from Sennaar and the gold countries, and also on that from Darfour and Kordofan

to Souakim, through which the Red Sea trade of the southern provinces is still mainly carried on. At Khartoum—sixty miles above the Sixth and last Cataract, if we except the recently discovered falls of Duffli above Gondokoro—the Blue and White Niles (Bahr-el-Azeck and Bahr-el-Abiat) join, the former flowing down north-west from its sources in the Abyssinian hills, and the latter—now recognised as the true Nile—nearly due north from the remote basin of the equatorial lakes.* Here begins the northern frontier of Sennaar, which may be roughly described as bounded east and south-east by the Taccazé and Abyssinia, westwards by the White Nile—which separates it from Kordofan—and south by the mountains of Fazoglou. It is for the most part a great undulating plain, increasing in elevation southwards, and, especially near the rivers, abounding in forest. In the neighbourhood of Khartoum the soil is mostly sandy, mixed with Nile mud; but farther south it becomes a deep bed of argillaceous marl, which, though dismally sterile-looking during the dry season, blooms with abundant crops after the autumnal rains. Its inhabitants, of a mixed Arab and Abyssinian race, are much superior to the negro; and, altogether, Sennaar forms potentially perhaps the finest of the Upper Nile provinces of Egypt. Due west, beyond the White Nile, lies Kordofan, much smaller in area, but differing little in its chief physical features from Sennaar. In addition to the tropical rains, it is abundantly watered by wells; so that even in the dry season—from September to April—it presents in a much less degree the parched and barren aspect exhibited by the latter province during the same months. Its cultivable area is roughly computed at about 12,000 square

* At their junction the Blue Nile is considerably the broader of the two, being 768 yards wide, while the White, or true, Nile is only 483.

miles, and its population at 500,000, as against respectively 60,000 and 1,500,000 for Sennaar; but such reckoning can at best be only approximate, as no complete survey or census of these regions has been made since their annexation to Egypt.

West again of Kordofan, separated from it by the narrow strip of desert peopled by the Bagâra and Hamrân Arabs, lies Darfour, which was only annexed in 1875, after the brief campaign provoked by the forays of its Ameer across the Egyptian border. This latest addition to the dominion of the Khedive is in reality a large oasis, wholly enclosed in the Sahara, and lying roughly between lat. 10° and 16° N., and long. 26° and 29° E. It has been visited by very few European travellers, and neither its exact extent, population, nor chief physical features are at all accurately known. Its capital is a town called El-Faschir, in about lat. 14° 10' N., in a plateau about 2,200 feet above the level of the sea. Towards the south the country is hilly, the principal elevation being a mountain ridge called Marrah, which traverses the province longitudinally, and is the source of numerous springs. Southwards it is level, sandy, and except during the annual rains—which begin early in May, and last from two to three months—nearly destitute of water. It produces, however, abundant crops of wheat, millet, rice, maize, sesame, and tobacco. Cotton also is grown, but only in small quantities, as, either from the want of water or the unsuitableness of the soil, it does not flourish, the plant rarely reaching more than a foot and a half in height. There is, however, thriving vegetation everywhere, and after the first rains the country is said to be “one sheet of green.” The fauna are similar to those common in the same latitudes east of the Nile. Copper and iron are said to abound in the hills; but the principal wealth of

the inhabitants consists in cattle, which, in the absence of coin, form the chief barter-currency of the country. Besides the traffic carried on with the inland countries of Africa, it maintains a considerable trade with Egypt and the Hedjaz, exporting ivory, ostrich feathers, hides, drugs, copper, and especially *slaves*; against imports of silk, cotton cloths, glass wares, trinkets, sword blades, firearms, and a variety of other goods. The bad distinction of Darfour hitherto has been as the chief *entrepôt* and *point de départ* of the Central African slave trade, whence most of this nefarious traffic down the Nile valley and to Arabia, through Souakim and Massowah, has been fed. The total area of Darfour is roughly estimated at about 450,000 square miles, with a population variously reckoned at from 3,000,000 to 5,000,000. A complete survey and census of the country are now being made by order of the Khedive, but none of the results thus far are as yet available for publication.

Wedged in between southern Kordofan and Sennaar, the Shillook country, which was only finally subjected to Egyptian authority in 1870, extends, in a strip of country some 200 miles long by hardly a dozen broad, to the junction east and west of the Sobat and Bahr-el-Ghazal rivers with the White Nile, about 700 miles above Khartoum. Its inhabitants, nominally Mussulmans but in reality Pagans, are perhaps physically the finest, as they are the fiercest, of the Upper Nile tribes. “No known part of Africa,” says Dr. Schweinfurth, “scarcely even the narrow valley of the Nile in Egypt, has a density of population so great; but a similar condition of circumstances, so favourable to the support of a teeming population, is perhaps without parallel in the world. Everything which contributes to the exuberance of life here finds a concentrated field—agriculture, pasturage, fishing,

and the chase. Agriculture is rendered easy by the recurrence of the rainy season, by irrigation effected by the rising of the river, assisted by numerous canals, and by an atmosphere ordinarily so clouded as to moderate the radiance of the sun, and to retain throughout the year perpetual moisture."* Fashoda, the chief Government station, is already the centre of a considerable trade, in which raw cotton—now largely grown, and for the cultivation of which the soil and climate are admirably adapted—forms a principal staple. A census taken since the annexation of the province returns 3,000 villages, with a population exceeding 1,000,000.

West and south of this, along the Bahr-el-Ghazal, lie the Darfertit and Donga countries, in the former of which the authority of the Khedive is as yet little more than nominal, and even in the latter it is effective only along the river valley to Gondokoro. To this point, however, the Cairo Government claimed to have pushed its sovereignty before 1869, when the Khedive commissioned Sir Samuel Baker to extend his annexations to the Equator, and suppress slave hunting and the slave trade in this great cradle of the traffic. A strong expedition was accordingly dispatched to the region, and during what may be called a campaign of nearly four years, Sir Samuel carried the Egyptian flag to the Albert Nyanza, and scotched, if he did not kill, the nefarious commerce at several points. It was probably not his fault that the Khedive thought the result less satisfactory than the cost of it had led him to hope; but be this as it may, early in 1874 his Highness induced Colonel Gordon, of Chinese fame, to take up the incomplete adventure on a less grandiose scale; and in the next couple of years, what Baker had begun was, if not perfected, at least extended

* *The Heart of Africa*, i., p. 85.

and consolidated without further costing a piastre to the Cairo Treasury—a judicious management of the Government ivory monopoly, which Baker had established, producing enough to defray the whole expense of the expedition, with a surplus of some 6,000*l.* to spare. The sum of what was thus economically achieved may be briefly stated: Feeling that the first necessity was to strengthen his communications with Egypt, Gordon began by connecting Khartoum and Gondokoro—Baker's Ismaïlia—by a chain, or rather network of new fortified stations, varying from fifty to a hundred miles apart. The first 500 of the 1,400 miles which separate the two points presented little difficulty. The river was clear, the tribes friendly, and the authority of the Khedive was represented by petty officers who maintained at least a semblance of law and order. But at the point where the great river ceases to be a single channel, where the Sobat—680 miles above Khartoum—pours into it from the east, and the Bahr-el-Ghazal (forty miles higher up), with its numerous tributaries from the west, the difficulties of communication begin. Here, accordingly, Gordon planted the first of his posts, naming it Sobat, after the river on which it stands. From this point other stations branch out east and west into the heart of the slave-trading districts, one of the most important of these being at Nazar, two days' sail up the Sobat. Some 250 miles up the main stream, but six days' march from it westwards, is another called Raticambé, in the centre of a chief feeding ground for the traffic; ninety miles further is Bor, and south-west of that again, far inland, Makraka, on the borders of the Niam-Niam country, which formed the limit of Schweinfurth's travels. Back again on the main stream, ninety miles above Bor, is the great station of Lardo, in favour of which Gordon has abandoned Gondokoro. ten miles