

THE
WILD TRIBES OF THE SOUDAN

AN ACCOUNT OF



TRAVEL AND SPORT CHIEFLY IN THE BASÉ COUNTRY

BEING

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES AND ADVENTURES DURING
THREE WINTERS SPENT IN THE
SOUDAN

BY

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CHAPTER X.

The Camp moves forward.—Scarcity of Game.—Water easily obtainable.—Difficulties of the Journey.—Baby Crocodiles.—Sheik Achmed rejoins the Travellers.—A *Battue*.—Mimosa-trees.—Road-cutting through the Jungle.—A Buffalo Adventure.

AFTER spending these two days at Toadelook, we made a farther move forward, being anxious to get well into the country without more delay; for we felt all the time that Sheik Achmed Ageer might give us the slip, and our people refuse to proceed farther. We made a march of only five hours and a half, encamping at a place called Toadwan. We pitched the tents high above the river-bed. Although we had considerable difficulty in getting the camels up, as the bank was steep, and a good many bushes had to be cut down, and grass cleared away, before the tents could be pitched, we were glad we had chosen this position; for the next morning, on awaking, there was a thick fog,—a most unusual phenomenon in this country. Whenever practicable, we encamped above the river's bed; for, though clean sand was very comfortable for the purpose when there was no wind, we felt, that, if the water were near the surface, we might, by sleeping there, run the risk of getting fever.

We readily obtained water, by digging to the depth of about a foot; and in a rocky *khoi* close by, a tributary of the Gash, there were some stagnant pools, but no signs of game, nor had we on the march seen any whatever. We were disappointed in

not finding game at Toadwan, as our Arabs had held out great hopes of our getting rhinoceros there. On the spot we had chosen for our encampment, there were the traces of many recent fires. It was evidently the place that had been selected by the Basé for their first night's halt, after they had driven off the cattle captured from the Haikota people; and there was plenty of evidence of their having slain and eaten some of the beasts. The next day we pushed five hours farther into the country; on the way coming to another *khor*, called Sobat, which we explored for some distance, and found running water, which very soon, however, lost itself in the sand. On either side grew coarse grass, ten to twelve feet high.

We were obliged to let the caravan travel the greater part of the way in the sandy bed of the Gash, which was most fatiguing for the camels. One of those bought on the Atbara had already died, and one or two others were pretty well *hors du combat*. The latter part of the day's journey was accomplished by the caravan cutting off a great bend in the river, and it was no joke to get the camels through the grass and thick fringe of *dhoum*-palms that bordered the bank. Some of us followed the course of the river; the great inducement of *moieh sarkit*, or water above the surface of its bed, being held out to us. There is always a certain amount of excitement in approaching water where it is scarce and watering-places a considerable distance apart; for, in a game-country, there is always a good chance of encountering animals, either drinking or returning from the water. We found the banks of the Gash narrowed very much, while great rocks lying here and there made it very difficult for our horses to travel; and, in one place, these rocks rose to the height of sixty or seventy feet on each bank.

We found a good deal of water, containing small fish and two or three baby crocodiles. It is extraordinary how these crea-

our water-barrels down to the wells we had dug in the Mareb, filling them and taking them back to camp ; in fact, we became the best of friends.

On the same day that Colvin shot the buffalo, William and I had a most exciting stalk after an ostrich. It was a fine black cock, and none of us had ever seen one of these birds in its wild state before. We had gone a long way from the Mareb ; and on ascending a small hill, in order to get a good view of the surrounding country, we suddenly discovered the ostrich. It is at all times an exceedingly difficult bird to approach, generally keeping to the open, and being always on the look-out for danger. The ostrich is supposed by the natives to be deficient in the senses of hearing and smelling, but to have abnormal powers of sight. The one we saw was by no means an exception to the rule ; it was marching about in a great open plain, covered with very fine dried grass not more than two feet high. To stalk it was next to impossible, owing to the almost total absence of covert ; however, we were most anxious to do our best, an ostrich being a prize one did not get the chance of obtaining every day.

For two mortal hours we crouched and crawled, and wriggled ourselves along the grass like eels, during the very hottest part of a roasting-hot day ; once or twice we stopped to rest for a few moments under a *hegleek*-tree. There was only an odd tree or two in the grass, which we kept endeavouring to make use of as screens between ourselves and the ostrich. On crawling near the tree in hopes of finding the game within shot on the far side, we discovered that we were no nearer to the object of our pursuit, as the ostrich had walked on all the time, and was probably farther than ever from us. At last, finding it hopeless to get at it in the open, we endeavoured to drive it towards a clump of trees to our left ; all to no purpose, as it was well on

the alert, and would never let us get nearer than four hundred yards. And so we never even fired at it.

I don't think I was ever so hot in my life. My clothes were literally saturated with perspiration ; I sat under the shade of a tree, while I took off my things, and dried them in the sun. We never felt any ill effects from the heat, although constantly taking violent exercise during the hottest hours of the day ; in fact, we were always better when camping out, shooting in the wilds, than when stopping in towns where there was very little inducement to take exercise. Taking plenty of exercise is the only way to keep well in a very hot climate. Although we never feared the sun, we always treated it with proper respect ; our pith helmets were the very thickest that could be bought ; mine, an immensely thick one, I had got four years previously at Benares, served me for two winters in the Soudan. We wore besides, down our spines, thick pads made of cotton-wadding quilted, a good inch or more thick ; these were buttoned into our coats.

The days were intensely hot, and very dry. I have seen as many as thirty-five degrees difference between the wet and dry bulb ; for some hours every day the thermometer would range from 85° to 95° in the shade, usually nearer the latter than the former temperature. I had a thermometer made expressly by Casella of Holborn, for testing the heat of the sun's rays, which, like all my thermometers, had been corrected at Kew ; and I have seen it rise during the day to 164° Fahrenheit, the usual maximum being from 150° to 158°. The nights were very cold, especially in the early mornings. After dinner, in the Mareb, we frequently liked to sit round a blazing fire. About dawn I have seen the thermometer go down to 37°, and night after night it would descend to 42° or 50°. We found these cold nights most agreeable, bracing us up as they did to endure the heat of

the day. The dews were frequently so heavy that the ground in the morning would be as wet as though it had been raining heavily ; it was impossible to know when to expect them, as the night after one, and in the same place, it would perhaps be quite dry.

On our return to camp I saw some *téél*, and missed one very badly. This was the only shot either of us fired all day. We saw the fresh tracks of more than one rhinoceros, an animal none of us had ever encountered. A great addition to the *cuisine* was made by Ali our cook, in the shape of wild tomatoes, which he found growing near the Mareb ; they were small, but of good flavour. Ali had travelled formerly along that part of the Mareb which runs through Abyssinia, where he said there was any quantity ; and he had been on the lookout for them for days.

One day when Aylmer and Colvin were out shooting, they came across a most saddening sight. Late in the afternoon they had shot a couple of antelopes, one of which they had left in the bush whilst engaged in cutting up the other. On returning to the first one, they discovered one of the most loathsome specimens of suffering humanity it had ever been their lot to witness ; a bent and decrepit old man, wasted with disease, and covered with the most hideous sores, was busily employed in gorging himself upon the antelope's entrails. He proved to be a leper, who had been ostracised by his tribe on account of his disease. How he kept body and soul together, it was impossible to divine. The Basé who were with them expressed the utmost fear of approaching him, and were horrified at Colvin for daring to tender him a more tempting portion of the animal.

We spent two more days in shooting, before shifting our camp. There was, evidently, plenty of game ; but owing to the

immense quantity of high grass, it was often difficult to get at it. The only species of big game of which we were astonished to find a scarcity, was the lion ; we had neither heard nor seen any since leaving Toadelook, and had, moreover, come across hardly any of their tracks. Giraffes we had seen tolerably often, but had shot only one ; and, as long as other meat was plentiful, we were not very anxious to kill any more. One day during the march, while halting under a tree, we had allowed the caravan to get ahead of us ; and two or three ran across the river's bed, just ahead of the camels.

CHAPTER XIII.

Aylmer and I start for Ma Ambasah, and find Water. — A Chase after Buffaloes. — Conical *versus* Spherical Bullets. — A Nasty Recoil. — A Visit from Sheik Kudul. — He departs, promising to return. — The Camp moves to Ma Ambasah. — Two Bull Buffaloes killed. — Some of the Camel-drivers sent to Amedeb for *Dhurra*.

ONE morning Aylmer and I started off for a *khor* called Ma Ambasah, where there was said to be a good deal of water; it ran into the right bank of the Mareb, about eight or ten miles above our camp. On our way there we each shot a *tétél*, after one of which we had a long chase before finally securing him; these we shot soon after leaving camp, so we sent them back on one of the two camels we had taken with us for the purpose of carrying game.

On arriving at Khor Ma Ambasah, we found, that, although there were no large pools of water such as we had been led to expect, still a good deal of water filtered up through the sand in several places.

There were plenty of very fresh tracks of buffaloes in the sandy *khor*, and these animals had dug holes in the sand in order more easily to obtain a supply of water to drink.

We had struck this *khor* at its junction with the Mareb, which we had followed up to this point; and, after having gone about a mile up its bed from this junction, we set off to shoot our way back to camp, intending to cut off the angle formed by the junction of the two *khors*. We had only just started, and

one of our men had run on ahead to the top of a small knoll on our left, to look out for game, when we saw him frantically gesticulating to us to follow him ; this we did at our best pace, and found some buffaloes crossing the rising ground about fifty yards off, separated from us by a narrow ravine. We each singled out one, and fired ; mine fell immediately to the shot, but Aylmer's, though hard hit, went on.

Hearing the report of the shots, some dozen or more buffaloes that had been hidden from us by the trees, rushed past ; we fired at them, but with no result, as far as we could see at the time. The buffalo I had shot, which was unfortunately a cow, though a very large one, was nearly done for, and could not rise ; so I put an end to her sufferings by a ball in the neck. Then we lost no time in starting off to see what had become of Aylmer's wounded beast ; there was no difficulty in finding a very distinct blood-track, and on following it up for about a hundred yards we came across another cow, this time stone dead.

It is all very well to talk about singling out the bulls, but it is by no means an easy thing to do. Sometimes one comes across single buffaloes that have separated themselves from the herd. These are sure to be bulls, and very savage bulls too. In meeting with a herd, all that you can see, as a rule, is a number of buffaloes, glimpses of which you catch between the trees ; for you are far more likely to find them in pretty thick covert than in open country. You fire at what you imagine to be a bull, and the leader of the herd. At your shot three or four more buffaloes that were in front, hidden by the bushes, rush out ; and you discover, to your annoyance, that you have only fired at a cow.

I had been nearly deafened by the report of my rifle, as well as almost knocked down. For the first time I had tried the effect of conical instead of spherical bullets (which I had

hitherto been using) in my ten-bore rifle ; although this rifle was supposed to be made to shoot both, the locks were probably not strong enough, as the concussion caused by firing the right barrel was so great that the left one went off simply from the jar produced. The effect of firing from one's shoulder fourteen drachms of powder and a good six ounces of lead was by no means an agreeable experience ; and, had a buffalo charged me, I should have been in a decidedly awkward predicament. The recoil was so great, that it had fairly spun me round like a teetotum, and my hat had been sent flying. The conical bullets are far heavier than the spherical. Exactly the same accident happened to my brother Arthur's rifle a few days later, and from the same cause ; we decided that in future we would content ourselves with spherical bullets, although the rifle should certainly have been able to shoot both.

It was long after dark by the time we got back to camp, and we found all the others had returned before us. Lort Phillips and Colvin, who had been out together, had seen a good many buffaloes, but had not succeeded in bagging any. Salee, who had been with them, came across a rhinoceros in high grass, which was, however, of such extent and thickness, that it was impossible for them to get near it. In following game into high grass, the utmost that can be done is to have a snap-shot at an animal making off, alarmed by the noise of approaching footsteps ; and, oftener than not, it is heard running away without being seen, although it may perhaps be within two or three yards of one's rifle.

Neither of my brothers shot any thing that day, though they saw buffaloes, ostriches, and two giraffes, and they might have shot *tétél* or *nellut*, had they wished to do so ; but it frequently happened that we felt obliged to abstain from shooting antelopes, for fear that by so doing we should lose a chance at bigger

game. There were, in fact, no days after we were once fairly in the game country, on which we could not have shot antelope, of one kind or another, if desirous of doing so; and there were such numbers of natives about our camp that we felt we could shoot a great deal, and yet that no meat would be wasted.

A very bad piece of luck happened to us that same day. While we were all out in different directions, shooting, two elephants passed within sight of the camp; they were first seen by some of our servants, who pointed them out to the doctor. He did not shoot, but walked out some distance from camp, so as to get a good view of them. The next day some of us took up their tracks; and after going a very long way, and seeing nothing of them, gave it up, and returned to camp.

A country may fairly lay claim to being considered a gamey one, where elephants, rhinoceri, buffaloes, giraffes, and ostriches are all seen on the same day, and where, in addition, are found seven or eight varieties of antelopes, wild boars (or rather warthogs), to say nothing of lions and panthers, which, though scarce in that particular part at the time of our visit, were nevertheless to be occasionally found. As for birds, there were swarms of guinea-fowl, partridges, pigeons, and doves, and many birds of brilliant plumage, if any one cared to collect them. Only once did any of us obtain shots at ostriches, and then at such tremendously long ranges, that it was, practically speaking, almost useless to fire. They invariably kept to the open, and were so extremely wary that we could never approach unperceived.

The following day my brother William had a shot at a warthog with a fine pair of tusks, one of four he came across in the bed of the Mareb; unluckily he missed it, so we had no pork for dinner that day. I must say it was no great disappoint-

ment to me, as the flesh of the wart-hog, though eatable when you can get nothing better, is not a thing to yearn after.

On the 7th, the day before we shifted our camp to Ma Am-basah, which was destined to be our farthest camp in an eastward direction, we had a visit from a peculiarly villanous-looking Basé sheik, rejoicing in the name of Kudul. We were informed that he was the most powerful sheik in those parts, and that it would be politic to propitiate him with some more valuable gift than any we had heretofore bestowed. Accordingly, from a box that we designated "the present-box," because it was full of things we had brought to distribute among the natives, we unearthed a very handsome *abba*, or cloak, of blue silk, with a great deal of gold thread worked upon it, which we had bought in the Cairo bazaars, and invested him with it. The ceremony took place in the presence of a great crowd of his people; and, although perhaps not so important an investiture as that of the Garter with us in England, it was, nevertheless, a very grand and solemn affair. Round his head we twisted a gaudy silk *kufeeyeh* of many colours, and wound a magenta *Cumberbund* round his waist.

He was greatly delighted with his appearance as displayed in a looking-glass we gave him. It was most decidedly startling! I fear our gorgeous gifts would very soon become shabby, or covered with grease from the amount of fat he was in the habit of putting on his head; then, too, most likely he would become not only an object of admiration, but of envy, to his Abyssinian neighbours; and some of the more powerful chiefs among them would, doubtless, very soon deprive him of our gifts.

He informed us, that, when he first heard of our travelling in his country, he thought we must be Turks, come with Sheik Said Carcashi (the powerful Basé sheik who is under the thumb

of the Egyptian Government, and lives near Amedeb), in order to take possession of the country. Had that been our intention, he frankly informed us he had made up his mind to obtain the assistance of some Abyssinians, with whom he said he was on friendly terms, in order to repel us. It was not until he had almost arrived in our camp, — at least, so he said, — that he had learned who we really were, and our object in visiting that part of the country. Previously to our presenting him with these things, he had gone through the regular *amān* ceremony, to which we had become so accustomed of late.

The only sign of his exalted rank, that he displayed on first coming amongst us, consisted of a singularly dirty and very gaudy red-cotton handkerchief, that he wore twisted round his head, and a kind of dressing-gown of the same material. We questioned him about the Basé dwelling on the Settite; and he declared that he had nothing to do with them, but that we could go among them if we wished to do so. He did not, however, appear to know any thing of that part of the country, and made us no offer of guides; nor did he make any suggestions as to how we were to get there.

The day after the "investiture," Sheik Kudul took his departure, comforting us at the same time with the promise of the pleasure of his company again in two days' time. As far as his appearance went, I never saw any one with a more villainous cast of countenance, nor one I should be more loath to trust.

On the 8th, we moved to Khor Ma Ambasah, close to where Aylmer and I had shot the buffaloes; and a prettier camp we never selected. Our tents were pitched some three or four miles from its junction with the Mareb, and above its sandy bed, in a place where numbers of lofty trees afforded us plenty of shelter from the sun, and where a kind of natural arbours

were formed by the bushes, in one of which we placed our table. The trees and bushes were of many different kinds, and in full leaf, and so thick that no part of the camp was exposed to the sun for very long at a time. As I have already mentioned, this camp was destined to be our farthest in that direction; this, and the place we had last left, showed more signs of game than we had found anywhere else, nor did we subsequently find any part of the country in which the chances of good sport promised so well. It was most unfortunate that circumstances soon made it advisable for us to retrace our steps; otherwise, if we had been able to remain longer on Khor Ma Ambasah, and could have penetrated rather farther into the country, we should doubtless have obtained a far better bag than we did. As it was, we spent three clear days there.

On one of these days we secured two fine bull buffaloes, one of them shot by Lort Phillips and my brother William, who were out together, and the other one had been wounded either by Aylmer or myself, on the afternoon of the 6th, when we each bagged a cow. Arthur and I were out together, and had not gone far from camp in the direction of the Mareb, when we heard a low moan in the tall grass that bordered the *khor*. We could not tell whether it proceeded from a buffalo or a rhinoceros, and were unable to get into the high grass to determine. We first climbed up the bank on the opposite side of the *khor* to that from which we heard the noise, and threw clods of earth and stones, in order to try and drive the animal, whatever it was, out; but all to no purpose. After a time we crossed the *khor*, and made our way to the other side of the border of grass, which at that place was narrow. As nothing would dislodge the animal, we felt sure it must be a wounded buffalo; and, with our rifles at full cock, we managed to push ourselves a little way in, but not until we had again thrown

stones to see if we could drive the brute out. A native who was with us declared he could see the animal's head, which he pointed out to my brother. He fired: result, a movement, and another groan. It proved to be a huge bull that had been badly wounded four days previously, and had retreated to the high grass, where he was lying in a sort of hole. He had only one horn, the other having been either worn off, or possibly lost in fighting; oddly enough, too, he was possessed of only one eye. These were the last buffaloes we shot on either the Mareb or Ma Ambasah, although we saw a good many, and fired one or two unsuccessful shots at them. Rhinoceros marks were getting quite common. These animals appeared to keep to thick covert during the day, and at night to go down to the *khors* to drink. Unfortunately there was no moon at the time, so that it was useless to watch for them at any of these drinking-places. Beside the grass there were numbers of *nebbuk*-bushes growing so thickly that it was often impossible to penetrate them. I have no doubt we often passed close by rhinoceri without being aware of their proximity.

One day two of our party went several miles farther up the Mareb, in the direction of Abyssinia, where they ascended a hill, from whence they obtained a good bird's-eye view of the country for some miles round. They reported that the mountains came down to the river's bed, which was fringed with *dhoum*-palms, but that the high grass decreased very much in quantity farther up the Mareb. They saw very little game, but came across a great many Basé.

The natives told us that the Basé villages extended about a day's or a day and a half's journey in that direction, from the junction of the two *khors*, and then came Abyssinia. Probably their villages ceased about ten or fifteen miles off, and between these villages and Abyssinia lay a neutral piece of

ground, upon which neither Basé nor Abyssinian dare live for fear of each other.

As we were running short of *dhurra*, and found that, contrary to what we had been led to expect when leaving Haikota, it was a very scarce commodity in the Basé country, it became a very important question to decide what was to be done in order to replenish our supply. Our native servants depended greatly upon it for food; and it was, moreover, an absolute essential for our horses. After some difficulty, and on promising a handsome *baksheesh*, we found some of the more intrepid among our camel-drivers willing to go with their camels to the Egyptian frontier town of Amedeb to purchase some. Besides *dhurra*, we told them to bring back some cotton cloth to distribute among the Basé. There was nothing we found they prized so much; for, as they were at constant loggerheads with the Egyptians, it was almost impossible for them to procure it. They started on their journey on the afternoon of Feb. 10.