

THE SECRET OF THE SAHARA : KUFARA

BY

ROSITA FORBES

Author of "Unconducted Wanderers," etc.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
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WITH 54 ILLUSTRATIONS
FROM PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR
AND A MAP



NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

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estimation of the older maps (1614 feet). Still it cannot be much less on the lake levels than fourteen hundred feet; therefore in considering the problems it is not possible to attribute the Kebabo oases, the villages of Kufara to anything more than the site of a largish lake in prehistoric times which sent its waters flowing west into the great Wadi al Fardi, the course of which seems to have passed through Taiserbo to Jaghabub and thence past the oasis of Siwa into the Nile near Cairo.

The Libyan Desert through which Mrs. Forbes travelled, starting from Cyrenaica and returning to Egypt, is classed by her and by most other persons with the Sahara; which properly speaking lies to the west of a long chain of peaks, ridges, and tablelands grouped in its central section under the name of 'Tibesti', the mountainous country of the Tu, Teda, or Tibu (Tebu or Tubu) peoples. But it would almost seem for reason of its past mammalian fauna as though we must distinguish between the Sahara and the Libyan Deserts, just as for similar reasons we do not extend the name of 'Sahara' to cover the sandy and stony wastes of Arabia. The true Libyan Desert—almost a more awful region of desolation than the Sahara west of the Tibesti mountains—would seem in ancient human times, fifty thousand, a hundred thousand, two hundred thousand years ago, to have been the western area of the Nile basin. Its mighty rivers, their courses still traceable, fed by the almost Alpine range of Tibesti, by the vanished rain from the plateaus and ridges of Wanyanga and Darfur, flowed towards the Nile between its nascent delta and Kordofan. Its mammalian fauna and to a lesser degree its flora differed in some important particulars from that of the Sahara (then possibly much covered by shallow lakes and inland seas); and still more from the beasts and trees of true West Africa or Central Africa. The White

Rhinoceros or a nearly allied form of it has left fossil remains in Algeria and is still found within the equatorial Nile basin. It has penetrated south along the eastern side of Central Africa, but it does not appear to have passed into the Congo basin or to have reached the regions south of Algeria or west of Tibesti and Darfur. The 'Black' Rhinoceros with the pointed lip has pushed westward to the lands round Lake Chad and into the basin of the Shari, but seems never to have travelled as far westward as the Niger or ever to have been found in true West Africa. No zebra or wild ass, so far as we know, ever left Algeria or the Nile basin to enter the Chad or Congo regions. Many antelopes have in the near past and present ranged between Mediterranean Algeria on the north-west, the equatorial Nile basin, and southern most Africa, but have not appeared in the western half of Africa.

The region therefore into which plunged the author of this book, with the concurrence and assistance of an educated Egyptian of Al Azhar University, has been of great interest to all students of Africa. Rohlfs's visit had almost become legendary and at best its reports were fragmentary and inconclusive. The Kufara oasis was the half-way house between the mysterious and recalcitrant Negro kingdom of Wadai and the Mediterranean coast. Wadai was the last of the great Negro States of Central Africa to come under European supervision and control. But even after Wadai—to the great benefit of North Central Africa—was conquered by the French, and its slave trade abolished, the oasis of Kufara remained for a few more years a legendary district, perhaps mainly created by the excited imagination of a thwarted German explorer, who had already crossed Africa from the Mediterranean to the Benue and the Niger, but who had scarcely penetrated to this secret land of water and palm