

A RIVER CRUISE THROUGH SOUTHERN SUDAN

Seeing Uncivilised Africa in Comfort

By C. W. DOMVILLE-FIFE

FEW rivers or regions are there in the world of to-day which exercise such a strange fascination over the traveller, as the White Nile and the Southern Sudan. It appeals not only to the explorer and big game hunter who desires to get away from the beaten track, but also to the connoisseur whose travels are undertaken solely for pleasure and interest, and whose first demand is that he, or she, shall be transported in reasonable comfort through a realm of both novelty and interest.

rivers, with their crocodiles and hippopotami.

For the first few hundred miles the surface of the White Nile shimes in the blazing sunlight like a lake of molten gold, ruffled here and there by geese, pelicans and thousands of water-fowl. The banks are low and flat, with the sandy wastes of Kordofan all around. Then the banks become high and the curious mud villages of Jaalin and Danagla Arabs are passed. On the west bank there are narrow strips of *safra dura*, a large-grained millet, one of the staple foods of the people of the Northern Sudan. About 130 miles from Khartoum the little steamer stops at El Duseim, a busy native town from which, in 1883, the ill-fated expedition of Hicks Pasha left for the Kordofan Desert.

Two days by camel from this place, Ril antelope can be shot by enterprising sportsmen, and here it may be remarked that there is no difficulty in obtaining local *shikaris* as well as baggage and riding camels. The hire of the latter costs from ten to twelve piastres a day for each animal.

After passing Kawa and Aba Island, where the Mahdi originated his Holy War, Kosti and the White Nile Bridge are reached. From here onwards there is no sand or riverain cultivation, and no sign or semblance of civilisation. Dense forests are frequent and patches of tall papyrus fringe the river, now a typically equatorial stream. Crocodiles, greyish-green, yellow-striped and loathsome, sprawl on every mudbank, until a shot from the deck sends them tumbling back into the murky waters which seem their only appropriate home.

This, too, is the land of the wild Baggara, the black cavalry of the Mahdi. These nomadic cattle-owners and erstwhile slave-raiders of the Kordofan wilds can still be numbered among the most turbulent peoples of the Southern Sudan. They can often be seen carrying their hunting spears and sitting astride gigantic bulls. When Renk, 291 miles from Khartoum, has been passed the country of the

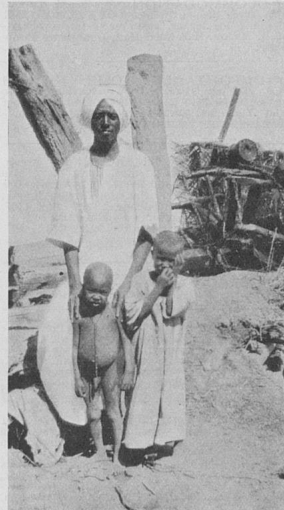


A SUDAN STEAMER ON THE NILE
 "Only a thin line of civilisation, bordered by the river banks, even now extends through this vast land, which is as large as British India"

Arabs is left behind, and that of the black races of Central Africa lies before the traveller.

The banks now become more swampy and reed-covered. Great patches of *um saf* float on the surface, and a sharp lookout must be kept for

the python. On its few solid islands are the villages of savage tribes, and when at last the ground becomes more solid after the Shambe lagoon, about 865 miles south of Khartoum, we approach the elephant country. The banks are no longer obscured



A CHAUFFEUR WITH CHILDREN OUTSIDE KHARTOUM
 Note the water-wheel with petrol cans on the right

A cruise by river liner from Khartoum—reached nowadays in luxury either by way of Egypt or through the country's front door at Port Sudan—southwards to the Great Lakes of Central Africa, affords what is really the only practicable way of seeing the savage Africa of Baker, Stanley, Livingstone and other of the early explorers, while enjoying the same degree of comfort as is afforded by the ocean-going cruising ship. Only a thin line of civilisation, bordered by the river banks, even now extends through this vast land, which is as large as British India.

The real starting point of this strange voyage is the modern city of Khartoum, capital of the Sudan, with a winter season that may be likened to that of Cairo in miniature.

When once the White Nile steamer leaves Khartoum and rounds the Mogren Point—the meeting place of the White and the Blue Niles—and heads into the African "blue," the last link with civilisation is broken, although at Kosti, some considerable distance further south there is the end of the steel road in North Africa. Ahead lies only the tawny desert, tinged by the sweep of the African sun from the pearl-grey of dawn to the orange of sunset and the misty purple of the after-glow, the grass-jungles and forests, roamed by countless thousands of primitive natives and of big game; the villages of queer huts; and the vast lakes and



THE BLACK RHINOCEROS TURNS TO ENQUIRE

the great herds of wild game for which this portion of Africa has become famous.

Hippopotami and crocodiles are so numerous as to be a danger to the little *ambach* (light wood) rafts of the natives. The reeds, aquatic plants and muddy waters around Lake No, which form the world's greatest equatorial swamp, are the true homes of

by papyrus, for tiger grass and *um saf* takes its place. When the Dinka village of Bor is reached there is much unloading of rifles and equipment belonging to the hunters, who are going into the interior to obtain ivory. It is here that what is known as the great Bor herd of elephants is to be found. It has been estimated that, in addition to lion and other big game, there are at least a thousand of these beasts in this comparatively small area of country. Hereabouts there are lion, rhinoceros, leopard, cheetah, hyena, wart-hog, duiker, gazelle, eland, roan antelope, reed buck, white-eared cob, hartebeeste and such game birds as the bustard and guinea fowl.

Just over 900 miles from Khartoum, Lado is reached. From here onwards the river banks are high, and are lined with giant forest trees. Shortly after passing Mongalla and Gondokoro, Sir Samuel Baker's old station, standing on a high bank and still showing some traces of occupation, although long since abandoned, can be clearly seen.

Only when Juba has been reached 1,000 miles south of Khartoum, does the steamer come to a final halt on the borders of Uganda and the Belgian Congo.

Further progress can be made by motor car, steamer and rail to Uganda and Kenya Colony. Perhaps the most pleasurable way of seeing Africa is to enter the Continent at Port Said or Alexandria and, after passing through Egypt and the Sudan by the 3,000 miles of the Nile system, to cross the beautiful Kenya highlands to Nairobi and reach the sea and ships at Mombasa. It may be of interest to note that this extensive tour through primitive Africa can now be accomplished for an inclusive sum of about seventy pounds.



AN ELEPHANT IN THE DINKA COUNTRY

"It is here that what is known as the great Bor herd of elephants is to be found"