

OMDURMAN IN 1907

QUEER FEATURES OF LIFE AND BUSINESS IN THE OLD CAPITAL OF THE MAHDI.

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OMDURMAN.—Omdurman, the largest native city of the Sudan, capital of the Mahdists and the British, and the future great commercial center of this part of the world. I was told that you can see it from the Nile, and one of the most important in Africa of the future. Founded by the Mahdi, and the Mohammedan Mullah, and the sons of the most famous conquerors and chieftains. Omdurman who succeeded him, once contained about a million of slaves and soldiers. It was then a great city, a camp, composed of mud and stone, and inhabited by tribes from all parts of the Nile valley. It was a city of the future. The Mahdi, a great conqueror, came here to live, and he allowed them to go home only to cultivate and harvest their crops, which they were forced to bring here for sale. He made Omdurman his seat of government, and he had his own residence here, a great wall of mud and stone, which included about 40 acres, and which was an open-air mosque of 16 acres or more. Here the Mahdi had his palace and here he kept his wives. Just outside here he had his great tent, which ended in the destruction of himself and the city.

OMDURMAN IN 1907.

The Omdurman of today is on the site of the great city of the Mahdi. It lies at the junction of the White and Blue Niles, in the bend where the White Nile flows into the main stream. By the course of the river it lies at 1,300 miles from the Mediterranean sea, and in a straight line, perhaps an equal distance north of the valley of the Congo. It is far inland from the Red Sea, and hundreds of miles from the source of the Blue Nile in the Abyssinian hills.

The Omdurman of the present is built out on practically the same lines as that of the past, and it covers almost the same ground, although it has much fewer people. During my trip I climbed to the top of the old wall of the Mahdi, and took a look over the city. The houses stretch along the Nile for seven or eight miles, with a thick wall of mud and stone, and the Blue Nile flows in. Some of the town is on the main stream, and it reaches out from the river in every direction. It is a native city in every sense of the word. In its many thousands of houses there are not a score which are more than one story, and you can count the houses made of burnt brick on your fingers. It is a city of mud and stone, and the one-story mud houses have mud walls and mud roofs, and the mud stores face streets paved only with mud. The vast majority of the houses are made of mud bricks, and the houses inside, which now form the quarters of the Anglo-Egyptian soldiers and officers, are of unburnt brick.

Standing on the Mahdi's wall one can follow many of the streets with his eyes. Some of them are of great width, but the majority are narrow and winding. The whole city, in fact, is a labyrinth cut up by the new avenues laid out by the British, with the holy buildings and the Mahdi's government structures in the center.

GUIDED BY THE GOVERNOR. I was shown through the city by the Mahdists. All the towns of the Sudan have a British official who rules them, but under each such governor is a sub-governor, who must be a native Egyptian. This man is the real executive, as far as carrying out the orders of the government is concerned. He represents the natives, and understands all about them and their ways. The Mahdists with whom I went through Omdurman, is an ex-cavalry officer of the army of the khedive. His name is Capt. Ahmed Hamed, and he fought with the British in their wars against the Mahdi. He speaks English well, and as he understands both Turkish and Arabic, he was able to tell me all about the city as we went through.

I came down the Blue Nile from Khartoum in a skiff. The distance is about five miles, but we had to tack back and forth all the way, and the trip took over two hours. The Mahdists met me on landing. He had a good donkey for me, and we spent the whole day in going through one part of the city after another, making the notes and taking the photographs which now lie before me.

QUEER PEOPLE THERE.

I wish I could show you the Omdurman natives. They are stranger than any I have seen in any African lands. They come from all parts of the Sudan and represent 40 or 50 odd tribes. Some of the faces are as black as a stone, some are dark brown and others have the color of rich Jersey cream.

One of the queerest men I met during my journey was an African with a complexion as gray as that of a tow-headed American baby and hair quite as white. He was a water carrier, dressed in a red cap and long gown. He had two great cans on the

ends of a pole which rested on his shoulder, and he was trotting through the streets carrying water from one of the wells to his black Sudanese customers. His feet and hands were bare, and they were as white as my own. I stopped him and made him lift his red cap to see whether his hair was white by age. It was black, however, rather than silver, and he told me that his years numbered only 25. The number tallied with him in Arabic, and coming from one of the provinces near the watershed of the Nile. He said that his parents were black, but that many men of his color lived in the region from whence he came. I showed him up against the mud wall in the street, and had two Sudanese watchmen blacker than he, with which this paper is printed, stand beside him and then made their photographs. The man did not like this at first, but when at the close I gave him a coin worth about 25 cents he advanced to the ground and went away happy.

TRIBAL MARKS.

I am surprised at how many of these people have scars on their faces. Nearly every other man I met has the marks of great battles on his cheeks, forehead or breast, and some of the women are scarred so as to give the idea of terrible inequalities having been perpetrated upon them. As a rule, however, these scars have been voluntarily made. They are to mark the tribe and family to which their owners belong. The Mahdists tell me that every tribe has its own special cut, and that he can tell from the scars on a man's face whether he is a Mahdist or not. The scars are of all shapes. Sometimes a cross will have three parallel dashes, and at another time you will notice that the scars are crossed, while at others they look like a Chinese puzzle.

The faces of the people are strange. Those of the better classes wear long beards and are clad not unlike the Egyptians. Many of the poor are dressed in rags, and the boys and girls often go about with only a belt of strings at the waist. The strings are like beads, and they hang to the middle of the thigh. Very small children wear nothing whatever on their bodies.

Many of the women wear no clothing above the waist, and they seem to have no sense of modesty about the exposure of their bodies. I saw one woman who was so fat that she could not get into a doorway. She was a good-looking girl of 18, as black as oil, and as straight as a string, and as plump as a pig. She was standing outside a mud hut, and she was holding a small child in her arms. She was naked to the waist, and her face was almost exactly that of the famous "Vestal Virgin" in the Corcoran art gallery at Washington.

THE BUSINESS CENTER OF SUDAN. Omdurman is the business center of the Sudan. Goods are sent from here to all parts of the country, and grain, gum, and other products are sent to the coast. The whole city, in fact, is a market place. The town has 100 restaurants, 20 coffee houses and 500 wells. It has markets of various kinds, and there are long streets of bazaars or stores, which each trade has its own section, many of the articles sold being made on the ground.

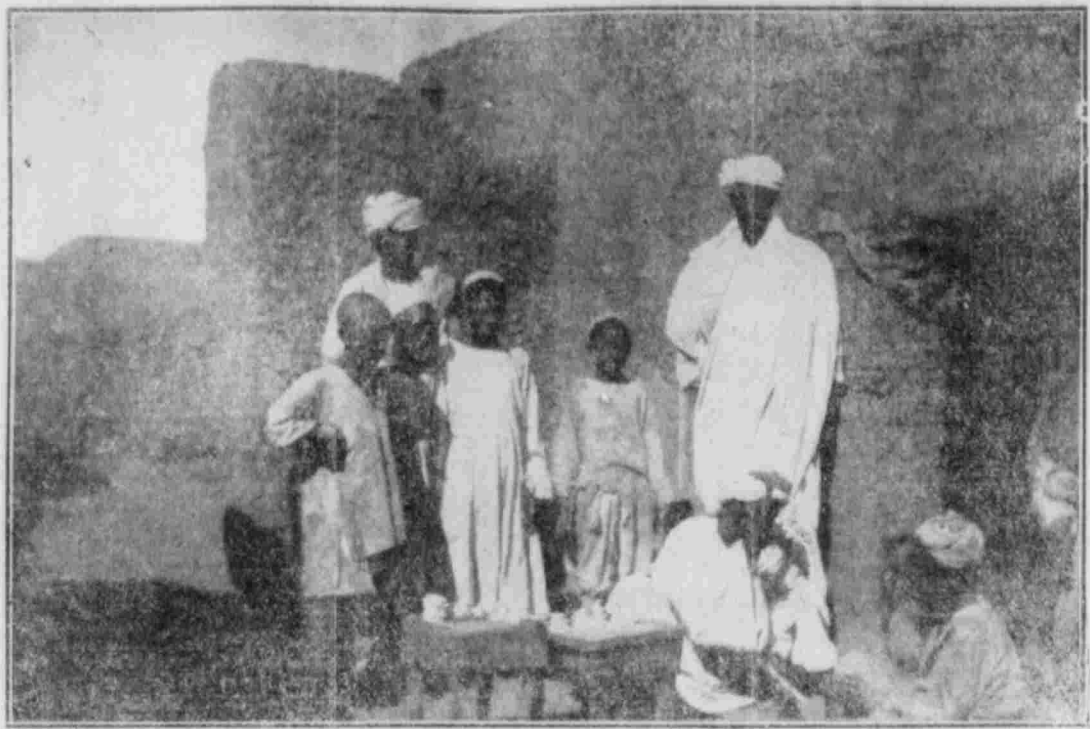
One of the most interesting places in the woman's market. This consists of a vast number of mat tents or shelters, under each of which a woman sits with her wares piled about her. She may have vegetables, seed, or fruit, or articles of native cloth and other things made by the people. The women have the monopoly of the sales here. Men may come and buy, but they cannot peddle anything. The Mahdists' precincts are not open to the women, and I understand that the women are shrewd traders. Their markets cover several acres, and during my stay they were thronged with black and brown natives.

Not far from this market I came upon the great square upon which the streets of the stores enter. This square contains 10 or more acres. There are a number of restaurants facing it, and in one corner there is a cattle market where donkeys, camels and horses are sold. The Mahdists under the government, to the extent that an animal must be sold there if a good title goes with it. If the transfer is made elsewhere the terms of the bargain may be questioned, and therefore the traders come.

SELLING MONEY.

It is strange to have shops that sell money. I do not mean stock exchanges or banks, but real stores with money on the counters, and stacked up in bundles and laid away in piles on the shelves. That is what they have in Omdurman. There are caravans going out from here to all parts of northern Africa, and each must have its own currency for the journey. These people are not far from the dark ages, and as far as their financial matters are concerned. Many of the tribes do not know what coinage means; they use neither copper, silver or gold, and one of our dollars would be worth nothing. Most of the people have brass wire and beads, and the only currency and store to say, every locality has its own style of beads and its favorite

Inhabited by Many Tribes, it is the Biggest Native City of the Sudan and The Business Center of the Upper Nile—A Look at the Markets—Stores Which Sell Money—Flour Mills Worked By Camels—The Silversmiths and Their Barbaric Jewelry—Queer Ways of Selling Grain, Etc.



IN THE STREET OF THE SILVERSMITHS.

wire. If blue beads are popular you can buy nothing with red ones, and if the people want beads of metal it is useless to offer them glass.

In some localities cloth is used as money, and in others salt is the medium of exchange. The salt is molded or cut out of the salt rock in sticks, and so many sticks will buy a cow or a camel.

The owner of one of the largest money stores of the Sudan is a Syrian. I found him not far from the great market, and he told me that he would be glad to outfit me if I went into the wilds. I priced some of his beads. Those made of amber were especially costly. He had one string of amber beads, five in number. Each bead was the size of a black walnut, and he asked for the string three English pounds, or about \$15. The string will be worn as a charm about some woman's bare waist, and it may form the whole wardrobe of the maiden who gets it.

AMONG THE SILVERSMITHS.

Not far from this bead money establishment the Mahdists and I entered the street of the silversmiths. This contains many shops in which black men and boys are busy making the barbaric jewelry of the Sudan. Jewels are the savings banks of the region, and many of the articles are of pure silver and pure gold. Some are very heavy, I priced three of silver worth \$5 apiece and handled a pair of gold earrings which the jeweler said were worth \$80. The earrings were each as big around as a coffee cup, and their thickness at the place where they are fastened into the ear was that of a lead pencil. The man who had them for sale was barefooted. He wore a long white gown and a cap of white cotton, and his whole dress could not have cost more than \$10. He was a black, and he had half a dozen black boys and men working away in his shop. Each smith had a hammer, five in number. Each hammer was about eight inches high and six inches wide, and pounded at the silver or gold object he was making.

In another shop I saw them making silver anklets as thick as my thumb, and in another they were turning out silver flagree work as fine as any from Genoa or Bangkok. The Mahdists asked me to take a photograph of them, and they kindly complied.

A little farther on we entered the

shoe bazaar, where scores of merchants were selling red leather slippers (turned up at the toes, and in a court not far away found merchants selling horse and leather frock from the tantries. They were selling the hides in the square, and laying them out in the sun to dry.

In the Manchester bazaar I found them selling cottons of many kinds and calicoes of gay patterns. There were but few American goods among them, and the chief importations were from England and Germany. I saw American sewing machines in the bazaar of the tailors, and I understand that they are generally used throughout the Nile valley.

During my stay in this section I bought some ostrich feathers of a merchant who sold nothing else. He had a large stock and his prices were fixed. My feathers cost me about \$2 apiece, but they are the long white plumes of the wild ostrich, and are far finer than any from South Africa, where the birds are reared upon farms.

IN THE GRAIN MARKET.

A large part of the grain of the Upper Nile comes down the blue and White Niles to Omdurman. The grain

toad is a hideous amphibian, much larger than any in this country. But in addition to its unpleasant appearance it possesses poison glands on the back of its neck, secreting sufficient venom to kill any small animal which tries to bite it. Many of the people are in the habit of eating toads, and the toad venom paralyzes the nerves endings of muscles, and so kills the infected animal. A few human beings, also, have been known to get this poison in their eyes, with a resulting severe inflammation and a permanent disfiguring swelling.

The habits of this toad have been under observation for some years, and the result of a study of the past has determined the toad's habits for this purpose, as it enabled the university station to obtain specimens in all stages of growth.

TOADS THAT KILL DOGS.

A large, poisonous marine toad kills cats and dogs by overrunning them, and American scientists are about to start a systematic study of the toad to discover some means to exterminate it. Says the New York Tribune, a big shipment of live specimens arrived in New York from Bermuda recently, and was taken in charge by Prof. Chas. L. Bristol, director of the New York Zoological station on White's Island, Bermuda, who will have charge of the scientific study. The toads will be studied in Prof. Bristol's laboratory at the university. He collected them in Bermuda himself.

According to Prof. Bristol this toad, the Bufo, was imported into the colorado some years ago from the island by a Canadian who thought it would destroy noxious insects. Instead of accomplishing this beneficial result, the toads multiplied rapidly, and are now a common pest-like the mosquitoes in Jamaica. This

markets are close to the river, and they run for some distance along it. There is no rain here at this time of the year, and hence there is no need for warehouses or sheds. The grain is piled out on the hard ground in piles and left there until sold. If you will imagine several hundred little mountains of white or red sand with wooden measures of various sizes lying at their feet or stuck into their sloping sides, you may have some idea of this central African grain market. You must add, however, that the grain is piled out in the tents of canvas or mud shelters, in which the ebony merchants stay while waiting for their customers, and must make a crowd of black-skinned, well-groomed men and women moving about sampling the wares and buying or selling.

The merchants watch the grain all day, and if they are forced to go away at nightfall they smooth the hills out and make caliche marks upon them so that they can easily know if their property is disturbed during their absence. The most common grains sold here are wheat, barley and durra. The latter is a kind of sorghum seed which forms the bread of the Sudan. It is ground to flour either in hand mills or between stones moved about by hallocks or camels, and is eaten in the shape of round loaves of about the circumference of a tea plate and perhaps two inches thick. The wheat is of the macaroni variety, which grows well in those dry regions wherever irrigation is possible.

THE MILLS OF THE SUDAN.

Speaking of the flour of the Sudan, I visited one of the largest milling establishments of the country during my stay in Omdurman. The owner is one of the richest and most influential of the Sudanese natives. He is an emir, and as such is one of the leading men of the town. His mills were

ALWAYS BEING SICK.

When a man says he always was sick, it is a good sign. It means that he has been through a great deal of trouble, and that he is now in a better position to take care of himself. This is the case with Dr. E. G. Gowans, who has been in the Sudan for many years. He has been through a great deal of trouble, and he is now in a better position to take care of himself. He has been through a great deal of trouble, and he is now in a better position to take care of himself.

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