

Travels  
OF  
AN ARAB MERCHANT  
IN SOUDAN

(THE BLACK KINGDOMS OF CENTRAL AFRICA).

I.—DARFUR.  
II.—WADAÏ.

*ABRIDGED FROM THE FRENCH.*

BY  
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ETC. ETC.

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would equal in number the Yagog and the Magog, and the vastest plains would not be able to contain it. Some may object that the women, not being exposed to the same chances of death, ought to exist in greater numbers ; but I believe that grief for the loss of their husbands, children, and relations, and the various privations and fatigues they are subject to, prevent their excessive increase. However, there are more old women than old men, even among the very poor. I have remarked that, in this latter class, the misery is so great, that the poor of our country would never be able to support it.

Food that is bitter and disgusting to us seems to the Forians exquisite eating. A little time after my arrival a dish called weykeh was set before me, and I was invited to eat ; but this was impossible. My father, hearing of this, said to me,—“ He who will not eat weykeh should not come into this country.” However, for some time, he had prepared for me a few dishes that I liked, such as rice and milk. When we went to the Fasher to visit the Sultan, we were lodged by the Fakiḥ Malik. At the first supper a bitter mess was placed before me. I asked what it was, and was answered,—“ Weykeh, cooked with heglig.” I found it impossible to touch it. Another dish was brought in, and with it came an abominable stink. “ What is that rotten stuff ? ” cried I. I was told it was weykeh dandary, which was considered a great delicacy ; but I could not put a single morsel in my mouth, and so Malik was obliged to send me

some fresh milk sweetened with honey. In the evening he asked me why I did not eat any of his dishes.

"The first," said I, "was too bitter; and the second was too stinking."

"My friend," replied he, "these kinds of dishes are necessary for the preservation of health in our country, and whoever does not eat them is in danger of disease."

The dandary is prepared with the residue of bones of sheep and oxen, which are thrown into a great vase full of water, and left for several days, until they begin to smell strong.\* Then they are pounded in a mortar, and reduced to a sort of paste, of which balls are made as big as oranges. To prepare a weykeh, one of these balls is dissolved in water, strained and mixed with onions fried in butter, with pepper, salt, and other condiments.

The common food of the poor is millet, not winnowed. Their cookery is detestable; they use a salt extracted from wood-ashes. People a little better off live, for the most part, on milk and butter. They eat meat only from time to time, when an animal is killed, and sold in portions for so many measures of millet. The young men often go out hunting, and kill rabbits, hares, the gazelle, the wild ox, the fox, and the teytel. The latter animal has the form and appearance of a tame ox, but is not larger than a

\* So the Forians, as well as the English, regard as a delicacy meat in which the process of putrefaction has commenced.

middle-sized calf. It has a couple of horns, one or two spans in length, nearly straight, and bent sometimes forward, sometimes backward. This animal is remarkably stupid, and only flies if it sees a great crowd of people; if one or two people draw nigh, it looks with a tranquil eye and does not move. If the Forians meet a teytel standing still in a plain, they generally cry, "Ya teytel, ya kafer!"—"O teytel, O infidel!" The beast looks at them with indifference, unless they endeavour to approach quite near. The teytel seems to be a variety of the wild ox, but is smaller; its colour is fallow.

Many people in Darfur gain their living by hunting. They are divided into two classes, and are generally workers in iron. They rarely appear in the villages, and form a caste apart, called Darmoudy. They are people without faith and without law, and it is dangerous to meet them in bye-places. The other Forians never seek to ally themselves to them by marriage. The first class hunts quadrupeds, as the gazelle, the wild ox, the elephant, the buffalo, the hyæna, the lion, the rhinoceros, &c. They dig pits, in which they place stakes, and cover them with slight roofings of branches and earth. When they catch an elephant, they take the ivory and the skin; the latter is used to make bucklers and kurbashes. Sometimes the Darmoudies use fixed lassoes to catch their prey; at other times lances and javelins.

The second class of hunters devotes itself entirely

to bird-catching. They seek principally the hoberah, a kind of bustard, which they catch with a worm and a line, like a fish. Small birds are taken by nets, to which they are attracted by millet-seeds. If a Darmoudy catches paroquets, or parrots, he pulls out the feathers of their wings and takes them home alive in a basket to sell.

There are some Darmoudies who go into the mountains to hunt various kinds of monkeys. The gun is never used either on this or on any other occasion. Some rich people keep a slave always employed in hunting; and I once tried to procure one who was clever, but did not succeed. The giraffe and the ostrich are hunted principally by the Bedawin Arabs, who run them down on horse-back.

The Bedawin Arabs of Darfur and Wadaï are abundantly supplied with everything necessary to support life. They derive from Darfur or Wadaï only a little millet, some maize, and articles of costume. In exchange for these they sell their surplus of butter, honey, cattle, skins of wild or domestic animals, leather sacks, whips, or cords. Most of them are wealthy in butter and in honey. The latter is found in certain trees where the wild bees make their hives. The chase supplies the Arabs with many advantages. Ostrich feathers and rhinoceros' horns are so plentiful with them as to be of no value. When I was in Wadaï, a Fezzan merchant came there to buy ostrich feathers,

and applied to the Shereef, who had succeeded my father as Vizier, for a letter of introduction to the Sheikh, Shaw-shaw, chief of the tribe of Mahami, in order to induce him to hunt the ostrich for a moderate price. The merchant had brought fifty Frank ryals, or dollars. The Shereef wrote the letter for the Fezzanee, who departed for the district where the tribe was settled. On his return, he related to me his commercial expedition in these words :—“ When I arrived, I was conducted to the tent of the Sheikh, Shaw-shaw, who received me with bounty and kindness, and gave me a tent of camels' hair, well furnished. He assigned to me a male and female servant, who attended me in all things. I had brought him a present, which he accepted with joy, giving me another in exchange, and I handed over to him my fifty ryals. He called together a certain number of his Arabs, and said to them,—‘ This man is my guest; he has come and confided himself to me, and wants ostrich feathers. Let those who wish to gain some of these dollars go forth to-morrow at dawn of day. Each zhalym-skin shall be paid half a dollar, and each rabadah-skin a quarter of a dollar.’\* ”

“ Next day, accordingly, the Arabs went out and brought me twenty zhalym-skins. I remained three weeks, and completed a hundred. Shaw-shaw put them on his camels, and carried them for me

\* The zhalym has on each wing eight beautiful white plumes, and the rabadah eight grey ones.

to Warah, the capital of Wadaï. He gave me, also, a plentiful supply of provisions; as melted ostrich grease, honey, &c. At Warah I sold nearly ninety zhalym-skins for three dollars each, so that, without any fatigue, I gained a pretty profit."

Milk is so plentiful in Arab encampments that they can never use the whole, in spite of the quantity of butter they make, and are obliged to throw away a large portion. In the districts of the Rezeigat, the Red Masirieh, and others, the pools and ponds are all white with milk.

Very few of the natives of Soudan are able to distinguish gold from copper, or tin from lead. Gold-dust is sometimes used, however, as a medium of exchange. In Darfur there are absolutely no precious metals but such as are imported from abroad, and even the ornaments of women are principally composed of glass beads. It is not astonishing, therefore, that the Forians remained long without knowing the use of silver or gold coins. When commerce, however, became extended, they were obliged to invent some kind of money, and they first used rings of pewter, which they employed for the purchase of daily necessities. For things of a greater price, a long piece of stuff, about five yards long, and half a yard wide, is used. Slaves have also a fixed monetary value, according to their height. For example, a horse may be worth three or four sedasy, or slave, who, from the heel to the lower lobe of the ear, measures six spans. In Darfur

are known neither the mahboub nor the piastre, nor any kind of coin used in civilised countries, except the abou-medfah, or pillar-dollar. In the chief towns glass beads are used as money; and in the parts about Guerly they use the falgo, or cake of salt, prepared in a particular manner. There are three kinds of salt in Darfur,—the zaghawy, which is procured from the lakes of the same name; the falgo, which is of a grey colour, opaque, and rather agreeable to the taste; and the mydaoub, which is of a blood-red colour, and by far the best. At Krousa tobacco is used as money, and is called taba. It is pounded into a paste, and made up into hollow cones, about the size of a pear. By the way, I have read a piece of verses composed by one of the descendants of the Kaliph Abou-Bekr, the object of which is to prove that smoking is not a sin. These verses date from about the middle of the ninth century of the Hegira. I shall extract one or two verses:—

“The all-powerful God has produced from the soil of our country a plant, the true name of which is tabgha.

“If any one in his ignorance maintains that this plant is forbidden, say to him, ‘How do you prove it? By what verse of the Koran?’

“This plant does not inebriate, and this is why God has not condemned it. Whence hast thou taken thy word of condemnation?

“If thou inspirest the smoke of the tabgha, it rejoices and solaces thee; but never forget to say



before the first puff,—B'ism Illah, in the name of God.

“And when thou hast finished, give praise to the single God, and this will bring upon thee abundant blessings.”

In some places little bundles of cotton-twist are used as money, and at others strings of onions. At one market the iron head of a kind of hoe is employed ; and in the Gouz the same purpose is served by handfuls of millet. In many places the measure of value is an ox ; and they say, for example, “this horse is worth ten or twenty oxen.”

## CHAPTER X.

Productions of Darfur—Fruit—Trees—The Thyleg—Nebks—The Ochan—Horse-stealers—Medicinal Plants—Seasons—Wind and Rain—Wonderful Plants—Herbalists—The Narrah—Its Magical Properties—Strange Roots—Robbers—Buried Sacred Books—Sorcerers—A wonderful Foulan—The Temourkehs—Strange Stories—A Slave-hunt in Dar-Fertyt—Sand Diviners—Prophecies that came to pass.

THE Forians, in their autumn season, which corresponds to our summer, take advantage of the rain to sow the ground. It is probably on account of these rains, which are very heavy, that they generally sow neither wheat nor barley, nor beans nor lentils, nor chick-peas. In Darfur we found neither apricots nor peaches, nor apples, nor pomegranates, nor olives, nor prunes, nor pears, nor the sweet-lemon, nor oranges, nor almonds, nor nuts, nor pistachios, nor walnuts, nor the fruit of the service-tree. The principal thing cultivated is the millet; but they also cultivate different kinds of maize. I have already mentioned, that in some districts wheat is sown. In the pools, and in places where water stands for some time, rice grows without any cultivation, and the people gather it in in the spring.

Sessame is sown, but the grain is eaten, and no oil is made. Honey is common in Darfur, but the wax is made no use of. Houses are lighted by a kind of wood. Charcoal is never made.

Darfur produces some small water-melons, which are eaten either fresh, as in Egypt, or dried and steeped in water, so as to make a kind of sherbet. Onions, garlic, pepper, and various kinds of cucumbers are sown, and several species of vegetables are found in some provinces. The river Kou flows through a great valley, which it inundates in autumn, after which, when the waters retire, an immense quantity of bamieh springs up spontaneously. There is a kind of bean peculiar to Darfur.

The only tree in this country which resembles those of Egypt is the date-palm, which is found in some districts. One of the most useful trees in the country is the sheglyg, more properly the thlyleg.\* There are two varieties, called the yellow and the red, on account of the colour of the fruit, which is about the size of a large date. The tree, by its stature and appearance, reminds one of the Egyptian sycamore. The leaves are slightly oval, and the fruit has a bitter-sweet taste, and a peculiar odour. It is prepared in a great variety of manners. Every part of the tree is put to some use. The young sprouts of the leaves are used as a seasoning; they are also applied to wounds, in a paste prepared by chewing, and

\* I suppose this is the same tree as the tholukh, so often mentioned in Mr. Richardson's "Journal."

form an effectual cure. The green fruit, pounded in a mortar, is used as soap, and answers the purpose admirably; as, indeed, do the roots. The wood of the tree is burned in torches to light the houses, and produces no smoke. From it also are prepared the slates on which the children learn to write and read. When burnt, the ashes produce a slightly bitter salt, which is used for seasoning. In fine, this tree answers even more purposes of utility than the palm.

There are two kinds of nebk in Darfur, the fruit of which is used both as food and medicinally. The tebeldy is a great tree with a hollow trunk, in which the rain collects and forms reservoirs, to which the wandering Arabs repair to quench their thirst. Its fruit is used to cure diarrhœa. The cocoa-nut is found towards the north. The geddeim produces a small fruit, to which I know of no other equal. There are many other trees of useful properties growing wild about the country. Two kinds of cotton are cultivated.

The ochan is a shrub, the different parts of which are applied to different purposes. It produces, among other things, a kind of down, which is twisted into thread, and used to repair the water-skins, to make cords, and to stop leaks in leather sacks. The juice, when applied to the skin of an animal, makes the hair fall off. Horse-stealers use it to disguise the animals which they steal. The tree which produces gum-arabic is found in sandy places. The vast branches of the haraz afford shadow to a hun-

dred men. There are many trees which do not produce fruit, but are used only for timber. However, I will not endeavour to give a complete account of the vegetable productions of Darfur, because when I was there I was still young, and ignorant of botany.

The Fertyts, who inhabit the vast country south of Darfur, and who are idolaters, possess a tree called the gana, which supplies a very pretty wood, used for making lance-handles.

Among the remarkable plants is the kyly, which produces the fruit from which is made the ordeal liquor of which I have already spoken. The leaves of the shalob, when chewed, take away the taste of wine from the mouth. The dagarah is used as a medicine in ophthalmia. I once was at the market of Numleh, and, having handled pepper incautiously, put my hand to my eyes; a severe pain and great swelling came on, and I was obliged to stop at a village and go into an old woman's house, suffering dreadfully. My hostess, however, sent for some leaves of the dagarah, pounded them in a mortar, and dropped the juice upon my eyes, and I was cured by one or two applications.

The greater part of the trees and other vegetables of Darfur have their fruit ripe towards the end of autumn, which corresponds to the end of summer in Egypt. The rains begin at the beginning of their autumn; and I have learned from various points that it is these rains which assist in

swelling the river Nile. In 1841 of the Christian era the great Kadi of Wadaï told me that 1837, the year of famine in Egypt, was signalised by an extraordinary drought in his country. The rainy season is ushered in by great wind-storms, which roll enormous clouds from the east, raising also vast columns of sand from the plains of the Gouz. The horizon becomes also of a blood-red colour. Rain always follows, accompanied by thunder. During the whole of the season prodigious showers fall, accompanied by violent thunder-claps. When the lightning falls it commits great destruction. I have seen branches torn away from great trees, huts burnt down, and a man's arm broken. The Forians say that those who carry iron about them are never struck, which is exactly contrary to the opinion of the Europeans.

During the Darfur summer great winds prevail, which raise enormous clouds of dust, and vast mirages inundate the plains. It has been noticed that the showers which fall during the night are much more gentle than those that fall by day. Rainbows are common; I have seen five or six at the same time, some rising straight up in the air. The rains last about sixty days; if less, there is famine. In Darfur and Wadaï the names of the months are of Arab origin, without any reference to the denominations used by the Greeks, the Copts, or the Europeans.

I shall now say something of the marvellous qualities of some plants of Darfur. I do so with

some hesitation, fearing to be accused of falsehood ; but there are some extraordinary things which must be told. The chief properties of these magic plants are in the roots. There exist in Darfur master-herbalists, who have scholars under them. They unite from time to time to go on expeditions, and climb the mountains, and plunge into the valleys in search of plants. They are called in Darfur, Magicians, and enjoy a certain reputation. They are all in rivalry one against another, and in strong competition. They keep their roots in horns of goats, rams, or oxen.

These roots are used for different purposes ; among others, to compose what is call the narrah. When I was in Darfur, there was at Jedid es-Seil a certain man named Bakourloukou, who acquired an astonishing reputation by the magical power of his narrah. When any one loved a young girl who was too rebellious to his wishes, he used to go to Bakourloukou and buy of his narrah, and rub his face and hands therewith. Afterwards, when he met with her he loved, he passed his hand over her shoulders, or some other part of the body, and love at once filled her heart, and she could no longer live without him. Even if her parents refused their consent to her marriage, she eloped with her lover. Moreover, if any one had a request to make to the Sultan, and bought some of this narrah, he was sure to succeed. Bakourloukou obtained in this way an extraordinary reputation ; and it became a saying

among the women, that he could obtain for any one two girls for five yards of cotton. One day a person who had some narrah came to see me, and wanted me to buy; but I refused, saying, "that I was young enough to please women for myself, and that I was in favour with the Sultan."

The Forians also possess roots by which they can do evil to their enemies. There is one which causes death if it be buried in the earth, in the shade of the head of the intended victim, who is at once struck with bewilderment and loses all consciousness, and perishes if a proper antidote be not administered. By similar means any particular member is paralysed. Others stun people by the smoke of certain roots, collected in a sleeve, which they shake in their faces.\*

The Forians also possess roots, the quality of which is to overcome people with a singular lethargy. They are principally used by robbers, who penetrate with them by night into houses, and if they find the inhabitants awake shake them towards them three times, upon which God shuts their ears and they understand nothing. The robber then comes and goes without fear; and sometimes kills a sheep, skins it, roasts it, and eats some of it, and puts a piece of the liver into the hands of each of the sleepers, and goes away, carrying with him what he wants. A little after the people awake from their trance, and

\* Chloroform ?



ask one another what kind of man it was they had seen, and what he can have been doing. . Then only they discover, but too late, the robbery that has been committed.

This employment of the mysterious power of plants is a thing known to every Forian. I once asked a learned man what he thought of these matters, and he replied :—"The books sent by God to the prophets, Adam, Seth, and Abraham, &c., have been buried in the earth, and God has caused these magical plants to grow above them. The winds spread their seeds to the four corners of the earth, and experience has discovered the strange virtues which have been communicated to them by the Divine Spirit contained in these ancient writings." For my part, I see in all these things works of enchantment and sorcery. The same effects are produced, in fact, by the magical force of certain figures traced in a certain manner, and by invocations of the superior and inferior angels. I shall relate some examples.

Persons of good faith and acknowledged veracity have certified to me, that in the war which took place between the Kaliph, son of Tyrab, and the Sultan Abd-er-Rahman, some partisans of the former, who were armed with guns, were so powerfully charmed by sorcerers on the other side that their weapons produced no effect. On another occasion, the Fakih Malik bewildered the sons of the Sultan and threw them into the hands of Kourra and FadhI, against whom they had revolted.

The persons most celebrated in Darfur for their charms and magical doings are the Foulans, or Felattahs. One of them, named Tamourrou, used to perform the most miraculous acts. A person worthy of credit related to me the following instance: "I went with Tamourrou," he said, "from Jedid-kerio to the Fasher; the sun was burning hot; the magician was mounted on a camel; he took his cloak and spread it before him, and then folded it up, and, placing it on his knee, pronounced certain words: afterwards he threw it in the air, and it unfolded and remained spread over him and me like a parasol, as if held by invisible hands. Wherever Tamourrou's camel moved it followed. This was an extraordinary fact. Well, we were proceeding on in the shade, when suddenly the rain came on and fell in torrents. Upon this Tamourrou said to his servant, who was following him on foot: "Give me a handful of sand;" and having pronounced certain words, whirled his hand round his head in a circle, scattering the sand as he did so. The rain-cloud immediately separated, one part going to the right and the other to the left, and we continued our route without having a thread wetted."

It is also related that some people have the power of paralysing whoever attempts to attack them. But the most extraordinary facts are those which are related of the Massalits and the Temourkehs, who have the power of metamorphosing themselves into different kinds of animals. All the

Forians say that the former can change into hyænas, cats, and dogs, and the latter into lions. Another extraordinary thing related of the Temourkehs is that, according to their own account, three days after their death, they resuscitate and come out of their tombs, and go into other countries to marry again, and accomplish a second life.

In Darfur, every one acknowledges that the Sultan has under his orders a number of men having the power of metamorphosing themselves. They are used as agents and ambassadors. If they are in danger of being seized, they transform themselves into air or wind. I once became very intimate with one of these people, and at length ventured to speak on the subject of his wonderful power, but he turned aside the conversation, and avoided a direct answer. Another time I pressed the question closer, upon which he smiled and said :—" I did not think you were so simple as to believe all that is said on this subject." Then he talked of other things, and soon left me, and from that time forward, whenever he met me he turned aside, and our acquaintance utterly ceased.

I was once following a Ghazwah, or slave-hunt, directed against the Fertyts by a king. As he owed me a debt, he took me with him to pay me from the slaves he was to capture.\* We advanced far into Dar-Fertyt, and remained there three months, in a

\* This royal way of paying debts appears to be common in Soudan. See the exploits of the Sarkee of Zinder, in Richardson's " Journal."

place without fruits or vegetables. One day the king sent for me, and I found him surrounded by green onions and long cucumbers, as fresh as if just plucked from the garden. I asked who had given them to him?

“They arrived from Darfur,” said he.

“Who brought them? and how can their freshness have been preserved?”

“They have been transported hither in an instant—look at this letter, and see the date of it.”

I took the letter, and found that it was from one of his friends in Darfur, and that it was dated the same morning.

“Do not be so surprised,” said the king, “for we have with us men of Temourkeh, who have the faculty of transforming themselves as they please, and of traversing the greatest distance in a very short period of time.”

“I should wish,” said I, “to see some of these people.”

“You shall,” said he; and accordingly, on our return, we passed through a village of the Temourkeh, and stopped there to pass the night. In the morning the people came to visit the king, and the chief said to him,—

“I beg, if you see any lions on your way, not to attack them, for they are our companions metamorphosed.”

“But,” said the king, “I should like to hear some of them roar.”

"The thing is easy," replied the Temourkeh; and he called three of his men by name, and they came near him, and then went away and disappeared in the plain. Presently we heard a roar that made us tremble, and the other animals exhibit their fear.

"That," said the Temourkeh, "is such a one;" and called him by his name. Two other roars, each more terrible still, were heard, and then the sham lions came back in their human shape. They kissed the hands of the king, who felicitated them, and made them presents of new garments.

"Well," said he, afterwards, to me, "you have seen these men; it was they who brought us the onions and the cucumbers in the solitudes of Dar-Fertyt."

I must not omit to mention the sand-diviners, who discover things that are both past and future. I had once reason to believe in their predictions, on the occasion of my journey from Darfur to Wadaï. I knew a man, named Salem, who had a son-in-law named Ishak, who was very learned in the service of the sand. I did not know how to provide for the expenses of my journey, and went to this magician, who performed his calculations and uttered his prophecy. I did not believe him at first, but I swear, before God, that everything he predicted to me was realised to the letter, as if he had read in the book of destiny. He answered to me that I should succeed in departing for Wadaï, with all those who composed my house, except my father's wife, who would remain

in Darfur. I said this was impossible, because she was most interested of any of us in our departure. But it came to pass that my father's wife refused to go, and escaped on the eve of departure, leaving to us her daughter, aged about seven years. We never knew what became of her. Ishak also said to me, —“The day that you arrive in your father's house at Wadaï you will receive a young slave answering such a description, but you will not find your father until you come to Tunis. The house of thy father is red.” These and other predictions were fulfilled to the letter.

Whilst we were with Ishak many women came, in a state of great excitement, to learn where they might find things that had been stolen from them. He pointed out the place, but refused to betray the robbers.

My uncle Zarouk once related to me that my father lost a camel in the desert, and found it by means of a sand-diviner; and many other curious things are told. However, I shall not enter into further detail on this subject, for God only knows what is true.

END OF PART I.