

OPENING OF THE ALBERT NYANZA.

It is understood that, influenced no doubt to some extent by the visit of the Prince of Wales, and anxious to do something which shall confirm him in the good opinion of Western nations, the Viceroy of Egypt has invited Sir Samuel Baker to take command of an expedition directed to the suppression of the slave-trade on the Upper Nile, to explore fully and in detail the vast interior reservoir known as the Albert Nyanza, and to bring the hitherto untraversed districts lying around the mysterious head waters of the great river of Egypt within the sphere of only of the Viceroy's authority, but also of mercantile operations.

The results of such an expedition are so full of promise to our knowledge of the face of the globe we dwell upon, in its least known and most inaccessible regions, and to the cause of a down-trodden and slave-driven people, that it is impossible not to be stirred up to our inmost heart at the bare idea of such a truly glorious and noble enterprise. It may be termed by some to be a war of annexation, and it may be said that Egypto-Turks, of a faith which tolerates slavery in certain forms, are not precisely the people to occupy Central Africa; but nothing could be worse than the state of the countries which it is proposed to open to civilization; there was no other power that could or would do it; and the boon conveyed to the people themselves is of such vast magnitude as not only to exonerate the means that may have to be used, but to stamp them with the unquestionable seal of a truly philanthropic and humanitarian morality. No man, too, more fitted than Sir Samuel Baker to take the lead of such an expedition, and no man more likely to carry it out with the least fighting and bloodshed than he.

True courage is always magnanimous, and Sir Samuel Baker has shown by the patient perseverance and self-devotion of himself and wife in carrying out a great purpose, that he possesses what is rarer and loftier than mere physical courage—the attributes of the highest intellectual and moral courage—that kind of courage which is sure to blend mercy with strength, and to be at all times conciliating whilst carrying out its objects.

It will be remembered that Sir Samuel Baker was led, when exploring the regions of the Upper Nile, to the discovery of the Albert Nyanza, from information he received at Gondokoro from Captain Speke. That lamented traveller had, upon the occasion of his exploration of the Victoria Nyanza, heard of the existence of another lake to the west or northwest, which he at the time supposed to be much smaller than his Victoria Nyanza, and which was also supposed to receive the waters of the outlet of the upper lake, the Somerset or Victoria Nile, as it has been called. After overcoming many wearisome obstacles (and who can read his narrative without a thrill of admiration for the constant cheerfulness with which the hero and heroine bore the terrible hardships they were called to face, the daily danger and hourly anxieties of their lonely life in Equatorial Africa, and the sickness and other disheartening trials which they were called upon to endure?), Sir Samuel succeeded in reaching the lake in question. It lay before him like a sea of quietude, with a boundless horizon on the south and southwest glittering in the moonlight sun, and on the west, at fifty or sixty miles' distance, blue mountains rose from the bosom of the lake to a height of about seven thousand feet above its level.

"I was about fifteen hundred feet above the lake," the traveller relates, "and I looked down from the steep granite cliff upon those welcome waters—upon that vast reservoir which nourished Egypt and brought fertility where all was wilderness—upon that great source so long hidden from mankind—that source of bounty and of blessings to millions of human beings; and as one of the greatest objects in nature, I determined to honor it with a great name. As an imperishable memorial of one loved and mourned by our gracious Queen, and deplored by every Englishman, I called this great lake the Albert Nyanza." The Victoria and the Albert Lakes are the two sources of the Nile.

At sunrise, on the following morning, Sir Samuel was enabled to distinguish, with the aid of a powerful telescope, the outline of the mountains on the opposite shore, dark shades upon their sides denoting deep gorges, whilst two large waterfalls that defied the sides of the mountains looked like threads of silver upon their dark face. The lake itself was a vast depression far below the general level of the country, surrounded by precipitous cliffs, and bounded on the west and southwest by great ranges of mountains from five to seven thousand feet above the level of its waters, thus rendering it the one great reservoir into which everything must drain, and "from this vast rocky cistern the Nile made its exit, a giant in its birth." "It was," adds Sir Samuel, "a grand arrangement of nature for the birth of so mighty and important a stream as the river Nile."

Unfortunately, at the period of Sir Samuel Baker's discovery of the Albert Nyanza, there had been some difference of opinion among geographers as to whether the Victoria Nile flowed directly onward from Victoria Nyanza into the White Nile by Gondokoro, or whether its waters mingled with those of Albert Nyanza before joining the White Nile.

Instead, then, of Sir Samuel and his wife, as to all appearance they might have done, keeping after their long fatigues, quietly in a boat, and allowing themselves to be peacefully rowed and drifted down the Nile, which is described as we have seen, as "a giant in its birth," they navigated the lake in canoes, in order to settle a question of no very great importance, as to the lake-feeder at Magungo being really the prolongation of the Victoria Nile, they proceeded up that river, which is a succession of cataracts the whole way to the Karuma Falls, where they were stricken down again with fever, narrowly escaped being eaten up by crocodiles, named the first obstruction they met with, we hope inappropriately, "Murichison's Falls," were deserted by the natives, were imprisoned on the island of Patana, were pillaged and insulted by King Kamrasi in sickness, and were subjected to no end of sickness, privations, and trials before they reached the White Nile. All this, when Sir Samuel Baker was next told at Magungo that from the lake to the Madi country, as there were no cataracts for a great distance, and that both the Madi and the Koshi, who dwell on the right and left banks of the river, as they were informed is to be done, in pieces to the shores of the lake. But two French traders, Messrs. Jules and Ambrose Poncet, who have explored the country between the Gazelle Lake and the Albert Nyanza, express themselves as perfectly satisfied that the river Jur, Bibi, or Bahr-Kakunda, as it is variously designated, flows out of the Luta N'zige (as they call the Albert Nyanza) into the Gazelle Lake. If this is so, the river of the Jur tribe and of the Niam Niams would present another means of approach to the great lake.

But this is not all. The same informants, who have trading posts on the Jur, have also founded another station, marked on their map as Cagomma (Kaguma), Establishment Poncet, on a great river which flows from southeast to northwest, and which is called Bahr-Bura, or Bahr-Munbutu. This river, they say, which evidently comes from Lake Luta N'zige, divides itself into about four degrees of north latitude into two branches, that to the east flowing under the name of Sawa, to the northwest, to go probably to form the Shary or Asu, which throws itself, after its junction with the Bah-gun or Bah-bi, into Lake Tsad. The western branch, which is much the largest, keeps its name of Bahr-Bura, and flows in a west-northwest direction to about the sixth degree of north latitude, at which point, according to the Munbutu people, after receiving another considerable affluent coming likewise from the southeast, it empties itself into a great lake, in part marshy, and which was called by the people of All Umuri, an Arab trader, Birka Matussat. This lake, again, is described as having two outlets: one to the north known as the Bah-gun or Bah-bi, joins the Shary south of Lake Tsad, the other, and the most important, issuing from the west end of the lake, according to all appearances gives birth to the Binuwa Niger, or, at all events, to an affluent of the Binuwa and Kwara—the Kibbi or Kulla—which in that case will possess a much greater importance than has hitherto been conceded to it—an importance equal to that of the Binuwa or Kwara itself.

It is not likely that there should be so much division and subdivision of waters as is here described. Excepting in a delta, the general rule of rivers is to receive affluents in their progress to the sea, and not to divide off into branches; but the region between the Albert Nyanza and the Gazelle Lake is nothing more than an inland delta, as is also apparently the case at the northern end of Victoria Nyanza, and the same thing might hold good of the Bahr-Bura and Lake Matussat.

This latter lake would appear to correspond to the Muato Yanvo, of which the old geographer D'Anville obtained some notice, and near which was Monsol, or Munsil, capital of the Anziko, proximately placed on the map attached to Mr. W. D. Cooley's "Inner Africa Land Open" (London, 1852).

It appears that an Italian explorer, Carlo Piaggia, has also pushed his researches in the same direction, and that he has obtained information of the existence of "a vast interior lake" lying on the equator or south of it; and Sir R. L. Murichison has justly pointed out that an entirely new field for research is thus laid open to the enterprise of explorers, who will have to determine whether the streams issuing from this immense lake and the adjacent region to the west of twenty-five degrees east longitude do not flow from a watershed entirely separated from that of all the affluents of the Nile, and which sends its waters into the South Atlantic Ocean, and probably by the great river of Congo.

It would scarcely seem that the immense lake here alluded to as lying on the equator, or south of it, is the same as the Matussat of Messrs. Poncet, which is placed in about six degrees north latitude, unless it has an extent of some six degrees, which is not at all impossible. Albert Nyanza has possibly an almost equal extent, and if it joins Lake Tanganyika, would embrace in its prolongation over ten degrees of latitude. It is curious, in connection with Sir R. L. Murichison's suggestion, that this great central lake may give birth to the Congo, that Fernando de Enciso speaks in his "Suma de Geografia" of a fact learned from the natives of Congo, that the River Zaire, or Congo, rises from a lake in the interior, from which another great river, presumed to be the Nile, flows in an opposite direction. This may be one of the rivers seen by Sir Samuel Baker, tumbling through gorges in the Blue Mountains west of the Albert Nyanza.

The theory, however, advocated by the Messrs. Poncet, of Lake Matussat sending off tributaries to the Binuwa Niger, and to the Shary and Lake Tsad, as also by Fernando de Enciso and Sir R. L. Murichison, to the Nile, is a very interesting one, and if held by the father of history, and by all the old geographers, the one half of the Nile flowed over Egypt and the other half over Ethiopia. "There are two mountains," said Herodotus, from information obtained from the registrar of Minerva's treasury at Laïs, "rising into a sharp peak, situated between the city of Syene in Thebais and Elephantine; the names of these mountains are the one Crophi and the other Mophi; that the sources of the Nile, which are bottomless, flow from between these mountains, and that half of the water flows over Egypt and to the north, and the other half over Ethiopia and the south."

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Such, then, are some of the points to be determined by the navigation and exploration of the Albert Nyanza, and they are of the greatest possible interest, as they will probably either themselves lead to the unveiling of the mystery which has so long made a blank on our maps in as far as Central Africa is concerned, or they may pave the way to the gradual unfolding of every detail connected with the origin of the Nile, the Congo, and the Binuwa Kwara, or Eastern Niger, of the Egyptian Nile, and the Ethiopic Nile.

Interesting and curious as the solution of such questions may be, great as will be the difference made upon existing maps, and various the people and the regions that will be brought under the cognizance of the civilized world, still, even all those additions to knowledge in importance before the prospect opened of an amelioration in the condition of the African races, only recently made known to us by the explorations of Burton, Speke, Grant, Petherick, Baker, and others. Of all the impressions left upon the reader of Sir Samuel Baker's book, those relating to the slave-trade of the White Nile are perhaps the most startling. Many people have thought of the horrors of the evils connected with Oriental slavery. Those who were most enthusiastic in waging war against the trade of the west coast were content, for the most part, to look upon Turkish and Egyptian slavery as a minor evil compared with that mixed up with the nature of Oriental life and despotism, that any denunciations directed against it would be as absurd as they would

be futile. No doubt, too, the slavery itself was a comparatively small evil. The subject of one human creature to another is not so shameful a phenomenon to the African mind as to be unendurable, when it takes that patriarchal and domestic character with which slavery in the East appears to be more or less invested, and more especially when the slave continues to enjoy a climate something like his own.

Sir Samuel Baker says, however, he said to have lifted the veil which concealed the processes by which the slave markets of Cairo and Constantinople were recruited.

Barth has given us a graphic if painful account of the expeditions of the Mohammedan Sultans of Bornu, Baghirmi, and Sokoto, carried on even into Adramawa and the regions of the Binuwa and Eastern Niger; and, still more recently, M. Mage has depicted, with the most striking minuteness, life, as it is on the Upper Niger and in the vast Pallo-Felatah dominions. That life appears, under the rude sway of the Mohammedan, to be one successive, continuous, and incessant warfare; the enslaving of everything Pagan; reprisals, murders, and executions. We have also heard something of the questionable proceedings of the Egyptians on the western frontiers of Abyssinia from Taha to the upper regions of the Blue Nile, and we have always regretted that the costly expedition sent to that country to liberate the British captives should have done nothing towards insuring the immunity of a Christian people against the enslaving propensities of their Egyptian neighbors. Sir Samuel Baker may be said to be one of the first to make us acquainted with the nature of the raids made by Mohammedan slave-dealers from Gondokoro against the Obbos and Latukas, and other tribes in the neighborhood, and which were so cruel and reckless in their character, that it has been justly observed, one of the worst features of Sir Samuel's journey must have been the necessity of witnessing, without the power of mitigating in even the slightest degree, the atrocities which the slave seekers committed. Under cover of carrying on an "ivory trade," armed bands of desperadoes ascend the river and penetrate into the heart of some savage country. To be at war with one another is a normal condition of existence amongst the native tribes. Taking advantage of this, the traders offer their alliance to the tribe with whom they first come in contact, on the understanding that they may be at liberty to make prisoners from the enemy. The African savage is either too simple to see, or what is far more likely, is willing, for the sake of revenge, to close his eyes to the fatal nature of the friendship offered. Assisted by his Mussulman allies, he sets forth on the campaign, and amidst the reckless slaughter that ensues, a draught of living captives is secured for the trader's net. But very soon the original dupes, if they can be so termed, discover that the trader is equally ready to turn his arms against them. In alliance with some other tribe, he makes war against them in turn, and the friends who assisted him to effect his first captures fall victims to his whips and chains in turn. Forced to some extent into association with the "ivory traders," Sir Samuel beheld their proceedings. Very narrowly did he escape a sudden death at their hands, but his wonderful intrepidity carried through, and he lived to register a resolution that, if he ever came back from his wanderings, he would do something to interfere with the proceedings which, for the time being, he could only contemplate with secret indignation. The time for action has now happily arrived. No doubt it will be a difficult task to persuade the tribes through which the "ivory traders" have passed, that the object of the expedition is simply the extinction of the slave-trade. It matters, however, little whether the Africans fully understand the expedition at first. The traders of Gondokoro will comprehend it readily enough, and they will soon feel, or be made to feel, that a prudent submission to the new system to be inaugurated is inevitable. This, then, one of the avowed philanthropic purposes of the expedition, with the anticipated opening of Central Africa to the purposes of commerce, and the withdrawing of the veil which has so long hung over so large a portion of the earth's surface, fully entitle the projected expedition to our most earnest hopes of success, and to anticipate that it will yet constitute one of the most remarkable pages in the history of our own times.

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