

QUEER PEOPLE, AND QUEER WAYS IN OMDURMAN

Frank G. Carpenter Writes From the Chief City of the Soudan Where Shops Sell Money

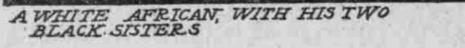
Tribes of Natives Are Distinguished by Self-Inflicted Scars Upon the Face



IN THE STREET OF THE SILVERSMITHS



SLAVE GIRLS TURNING THE WHEEL THAT FURNISHES THE WATER-SUPPLY



A WHITE AFRICAN, WITH HIS TWO BLACK SISTERS



THE MAMOUR WHO WENT WITH ME THROUGH OMDURMAN, IS AN EGYPTIAN EX-CAVALRY OFFICER

BY FRANK G. CARPENTER.

OMDURMAN! The biggest native city of the Sultan! The capital of the Mahdi and the Khalifa, and the future great commercial center of this part of the world. I wish I could show it to you as I saw it, while riding on donkey back through it with its Egyptian Governor. It is one of the queerest cities of the world, and one of the most important to Africa of the future. Founded by the Mahdi, or the Mohammedan Messiah, and the scene of the most atrocious cruelties and extravagances of Khalifa who succeeded him, it once contained about one million of African Sudanese. It was then a great military camp, composed of 100,000 mud houses, and inhabited by tribes from all parts of the 1,000,000 square miles, comprised in the realm of that savage Governor. The Khalifa forced the people to come here to live that he might have his services in time of war, 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 inside a great wall of sun-dried brick, which enclosed about 60 acres, and in which was an open-air mosque of 10 acres or more. Here the Khalifa had his palace and here he kept his 400 wives. Just outside here he had the great battlements 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 Khalifa. It lies at the junction of the White Nile and Blue Nile, in the bend where the White Nile flows into the main stream. By the course of the river it is about 1800 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 laid out on practically the same lines as that of the past, and it covers almost the same ground, although it has reached fewer people. During my trip I climbed to the top of the old palace of the Khalifa and took a look over the city.

The houses straggled along the Nile for seven or eight miles, with a thicket of boats upon the shore opposite where 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 of more than one story, and you can count the houses made of burnt brick on your fingers. It is a city of mud, pure and simple. The one-story mud houses have mud walls about them, and the mud stores face streets paved only with mud. The vast inclosures of the Khalifa are made of mud bricks, and the houses inside, which now form the quarters of the Anglo-Egyptian soldiers and officers, are of unburned dirt. Standing on the Khalifa's palace one can follow many of the streets with his eye. Some of them are of great width, but the majority are narrow and winding. The whole city, in fact, is a labyrinth cut by the new avenues laid out by the British, with the holy buildings of the Khalifa's government structures in the center.

Guided by the Governor.

I was shown through the city by the Mamour. 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 Mamour, with whom I went through Omdurman, is an ex-cavalry officer of the army, and the Khedive. His name is Captain Ahmed Handy, and he fought with the British in

their wars against the Khalifa. 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.

We 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 Mamour 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 These.

I wish I could show you the Omdurman natives. They are stranger than any I have seen in my African travels. They come from all parts of the Sudan and represent 40 or 50 odd tribes. Some of the faces are as black as stove 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, coming from one of 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 customer. His feet and hands were bare and they were as white as my own. I stopped him and made him lift his red fez cap to see whether his hair was white by age. It was flaxen, however, rather than silver, and he told me that his years numbered only 25. The Mamour talked with him in Arabic, and learned that he was a pure Sudanese, coming from one of the provinces near the watershed of the Congo. He said that his parents were jet black, but that many men of his color were white, and that he was a white man, 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 gave me the idea of a photograph, and he went away happy.

Tribal Marks.

I am surprised at how many of these people have scars on their faces. Nearly every other man I meet has the marks of great gashes on his cheeks, forehead or breast, and some of the women are scarred so as to give the idea of terrible brutalities 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 Mamour tells me that every tribe has its own special cut, and that he can tell from just where a man comes by such marks. The cuts are of all shapes. Sometimes a cheek will have three parallel gashes, and at another time you will notice that the cuts are crossed while at others they look like a Chinese puzzle.

The dress of the people is strange. Those of the better classes wear long gowns and are clad in like the Egyptians. Many of the poor are almost naked, and the boys and girls often go about with only a belt or string at the waist. The string is like the tassels, and they fall to the middle of the thigh. Very small children wear nothing whatever.

Many of the women wear no clothing above the waist, and they seem to have no false modesty about the exposure of their persons. I saw one near the ferry as I landed this morning. She was a good-looking girl of 18, as black as old ebony, as straight as a string and as plump as a partridge. She was standing outside a mud hut shaking a sieve containing sesame seed. She held the sieve with both hands high over her head, so that the wind might blow away the chaff, as the seed fell to the ground. She was naked to the waist, and her pose was almost exactly that of the famed "Vestal Virgin" in the Corcoran Art Gallery at Washington.

Omdurman is the business center of the

Soudan. Goods are sent from here to all parts of the country, and grain, gum arabic, ostrich feathers, ivory and native cotton are brought in for sale. The town has 100 restaurants, 20 coffee-houses and 300 wells. It has markets of various kinds, and there are long streets of bazaars or stores, in which each trade has its own section, many of the articles sold being made on the ground.

One of the most interesting places is 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, grain or fowls, 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 within the women's precincts, nor can they open stands there. 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 into the great square upon which the streets of the stores enter. This square contains ten 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 sales are 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 north-central Africa, and each must have its own treasury for the journey. These people are not far from the dark ages, as far as their financial matters are concerned. Many of them do not know what coinage means; they use neither copper, silver nor gold, and one of our dollars would be worth nothing. Among many of the people brass wire and beads are the only currency, and, strange to say, every locality has its own style of beads and its favorite 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, and he had one string of amber lumps, five in number. Each bead was the size of a black walnut, and he asked for the string three English pounds, or about fifteen American dollars. 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 goes in it.

Among the Silversmiths.

Not far from this bead money establishment the Mamour 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 this region, and many of the articles are of pure silver and pure gold. Some are very heavy. I priced rings of silver worth \$5 apiece and handled a pair of solid earrings which the jeweler said were worth \$60. 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 sat on the ground before a little anvil 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 dagger work as fine as any from Genoa, or Bangkok. The Mamour asked two of

Rare Ice.

IRVING BROKAW, America's champion figure skater, said of skating at a dinner at the Knickerbocker Club in New York:

"I'm not good skaters in this part of the country because we don't get enough ice. Good ice is as rare with us as jewels. The way we prize it is almost a little hurt at having been mistaken for a boaster."

"The porter glanced up, and then, as he stooped off, called back over his shoulder:

A Solid Liquid.

Captain Biglow, of Yale, was talking about an incident in the football team. "He'll never make a football player," said Captain Biglow. "He is as different from a football player as a bottle of brown fluid. I heard last summer was different from beer."

"A man with a motor-cycle stopped at a mountain inn where I was lunching one sultry afternoon, and asked for a sunny shelf a bottle hung with cobwebs. He dusted it, and set it before the cyclist with a flourish."

"'You'll find this the best Milwaukee, sir,' he yelled."

"The cyclist opened the bottle, poured a little into a glass, and frowned."

"'Landlord,' he said, 'this is very thick and muddy beer.'"

"The landlord lifted the glass and looked at it. He lifted it from side to side. It was so thick and muddy that it would scarcely spill."

"'It's the thunder,' he muttered. 'It's the thunder that has done this.'"

"'Well, thunder or no thunder, I can't drink it,' said the motor-cyclist; 'but I'll tell you what you might do. You might just put it in a paper bag for me, and I'll eat it on my way home.'"

The Eye on the Pole.

Admiral Chadwick, at the recent convention of the League of American Municipalities at Norfolk, said that most European cities, especially the cities of Germany, were better governed than ours.

"Why," said Admiral Chadwick afterwards, "some of our cities are conducted in so absurd a manner that it seems as if their citizens know no more about municipal government than savages know about optics."

"Savages and the semi-civilized know little, of course, of optics, of modern progress, or of science. Let me tell you something apropos that happened to a friend of mine."

"I have a friend, an ex-sailor, who owns a big plantation in Ceylon. His workmen are very slow and lazy. In fact, when he is not about, they shirk their tasks dreadfully. And this is why, having to go away for the day in a particularly busy season, my friend went out into the fields, called

himself 'the eye on the pole,' and took from its socket the glass eye that a gunshot wound obliged him to wear."

"'Men,' he said, holding the 'eye aloft, 'I am going away for the day. I must leave you alone with your work here. Your work is very important, and you must not neglect it while I'm gone. I shall be gone, but see, I shall leave my eye behind to watch you for me.'"

"'He set the glass eye on the top of a pole with a stately gesture, and departed amid a great silence.'"

"The men worked feverishly under the stern observation of the eye upon the pole. For two hours, till nearly 10 o'clock in the morning, they dug and delved like mad. Then one of their number, a clever chap, stole round to the rear of the pole, and, softly approaching the eye from behind, placed his hat over it. Thereupon a shout of joy went up, and all hands lay down in the shade and smoked and ate and slept till sunset."

The Montreal Gurgle.

"Stuyvesant Fish," said a Pittsburgh banker, "is a very finicky person. To get along with him, you must be mighty particular about etiquette; you must shave twice a day—dress for dinner—all that sort of thing. If you don't come up to his standard, he is apt to say some very cutting things about you."

"I once sat beside Mr. Fish at a dinner at the Union League in New York. Mr. Fish, when the soup was served, began to cast sneering glances at a stout, red-faced chap opposite us; and finally he said to me: 'That fellow is from Montreal. I can tell it by his accent.'"

"'By his accent?' said I. 'But, Mr. Fish, the man hasn't spoken.'"

"'Mr. Fish's lip curled in a scornful smile.

"'I had reference,' he said, 'to the accent with which he eats his soup.'"

Too Much Golf.

Robert J. Burdette, the famous humorist, during a recent visit to New York talked about golf marriage. "It is a great game," he said to a reporter. "Do you have it here? In our year round, Los Angeles we play it all the year round. We have it on the bar there. Golf caused a Los Angeles minister to make a terrible slip in the pulpit the other Sunday."

"The minister before this Sunday, the minister, who is an enthusiastic golfer, had been nearly heartbroken by the loss of a match game that had seemed entirely his. But, after playing superbly, he fell off at the end, and his opponent beat him out."

"This must have weighed on the minister's mind, for when he rose in the pulpit the next morning to announce his text, he began solemnly:

"'What shall I profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose the last hole?'"

Worse and Worse.

"The late Admiral Walker," said a naval officer in Washington, "believed heartily in marriage for sailors. He always urged sailors to wed. Nautical bachelors were held up to scorn by him."

"Strutting with him in New York one day, we met a young ship-broker. Ad-

miral Walker hailed the young man delightedly. He clapped him on the back, wrung his hand, and cried:

"'Congratulations on your marriage, my young friend. No more sewing on of buttons now, eh?'"

"'No, indeed,' said the ship-broker, sharply. 'I wear a belt now. It keeps me so busy raising the money to pay my wife's bills that I have no time to sew on buttons.'"

A Difficult Linguo.

"When George Ade wintered in Egypt," said a Baltimorean, "it amused him a good deal to see the serious way in which his fellow-countrymen took their snatching of Egyptian archeology, of the Arabic tongue, and of the ancient Egyptian dynasties. They had picked up all this filmy knowledge in a weak or two's reading, but they acted as though it was the precious fruit of a lifetime's study."

"At Assouan, one fine day, a young woman from St. Joseph complained that she could not understand the Arabic of her guide. To the crowd that encircled her she pointed out the guide—a bent old fellow with a white beard—and she said bitterly that, after her thorough study of Arabic, it seemed strange that she and this guide could not converse."

"'It's your own fault, Miss Hodson. You should have hired a younger guide. These toothless old ones all speak gum Arabic.'"

Thomas, the Tank.

E. J. Berwind, the great coal operator of Philadelphia, was asked by a reporter, at his beautiful Newport villa, which is a rather stupid question in finance. Mr. Berwind laughed.

"That question," he said, "is about as absurd and as ludicrous as a tabernacle I once saw in a little French theater in New Orleans."

"The curtain rose up in the theater, revealing a large bed draped with crapes, and occupied by an elderly woman who held a black-edged handkerchief to her eyes. A widow, plainly, of but a few days' standing. She wept. Her husband was still raw."

"On the other pillow, beside the widow lay a large bottle of gin. She turned towards the bottle, and sobbing as if her heart would break, she said tenderly:

"'Ah, when I see and smell the gin there, I think it's poor Thomas back at my side again.'"

A New Definition.

A rather cynical joke has been recently accredited to Senator Platt.

"The Senator, on his last visit to the Manhattan Beach hotel, allowed a pretty little girl, a Western millionaire's daughter, to be presented to him."

"The little girl, in the course of one of her many delightful chats with the aged statesman, said:

"'Tell me, won't you, Senator, what political economy is?'"

"Senator Platt replied, 'is the art of never buying more votes than you actually need.'"

The Nova Scotia government has appointed a commission to examine into and report on the feasibility of old-age pensions for workmen.

Good Stories Told of Prominent People