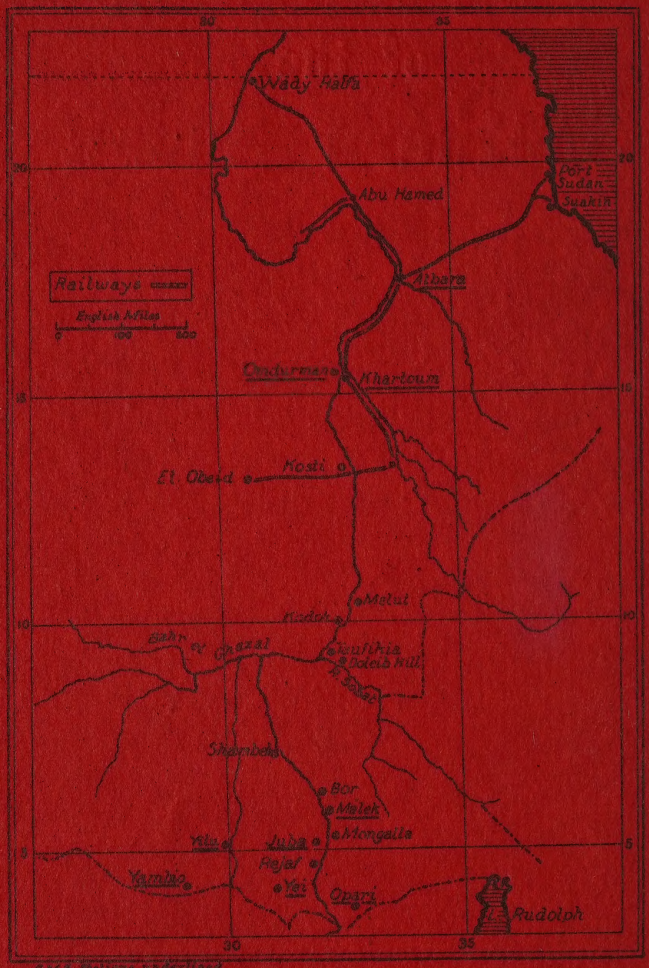
Among the Pagans of the Southern Sudan

CHURCH MISSIONARY SOCIETY
Salisbury Square, London, E.C.4

THE SUDAN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AMONG THE PAGANS OF THE SOUTHERN SUDAN

CLOSE to the Sirdar's palace, in the centre of Khartoum, stands the statue of one of Britain's noblest soldiers — General Gordon. He is seated on his camel with his back to the palace, gazing out towards the desert.

Some time ago two Englishmen were looking at the statue, and remarked on its position to their Arab guide. "Ought not the statue to have faced the palace gardens?" they said. "Oh no," replied the Arab; "Gordon Pasha is looking at the right place—the Sudan. See, it was for the Sudan that Gordon Pasha died; so they put him looking, not at the palace, nor to the north whence help was coming, nor to the Nile where he might have escaped, but to the great Sudan, for which he fought so hard and for which he gave his life. He is waiting for the morning, and with you English the dawn is come."

Sudan (from the Arabic "*sawad*") means "land of darkness," and the name is appropriate, for from the earliest times the vast tract of country, stretching across Central Africa from the Atlantic to the borders of Abyssinia, has been in darkness—religious, social, and political. Its many kingdoms and tribes have been engaged in constant warfare, both among themselves, and, in the case of the region which we now know as the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, with the successive conquerors of the adjoining land of Egypt.

In 1874 General Gordon was appointed Governor of the Equatorial Province of the Sudan, under the Khedive of Egypt, and later was made Governor-General of the Sudan, a post which he resigned in 1879. During his time of office, he made the welfare of the peoples of the Sudan his one great aim, and it says much for his energy

and statesmanship that in those few years he succeeded in suppressing the slave trade for the time being, and in bringing something like order out of chaos. The improvement, however, was shortlived, for with the resignation of Gordon it came to an end.

Two years later there appeared in the Sudan Mohammed Ahmed, the man who was afterwards acclaimed by the Moslems as their Mahdi, or expected leader, whose coming is foretold in the Koran. Although of poor family and having but little education, he was a man of great force of character and fervent religious zeal, combined with much political shrewdness. His fame as a religious leader and holy man spread far and wide, and when he proclaimed a *jihad* (holy war) against the Egyptian Government, men flocked to his standard from all parts of the Sudan. He and his followers gained victory after victory, until in 1884 practically the whole of the Eastern Sudan was his. Egypt, realizing that it was lost to her, concentrated her efforts on withdrawing her troops, 40,000 of whom were scattered throughout the country in isolated garrisons. To accomplish this she called to her aid General Gordon. It was an impossible task, and he was left to do it alone.

His heroic defence of Khartoum, where he was hemmed in by the Mahdists, stands out as one of the finest deeds in the history of our Empire. The only Englishman in the city, for 321 days (12 March, 1884, to 26 January, 1885) he bravely stood to his post, striving to inspire his incompetent officers and the listless population with his own steadfast courage, and waiting with dwindling hope for the relief force which arrived too late. Then came the end—the night attack, the javelin throw—and Gordon died as he had lived, a Christian soldier and "a very gallant gentleman."

It was not until 1898 that the power of the Mahdi was finally and completely shattered by Colonel (afterwards Lord) Kitchener at the battle of Omdurman. Since that time the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan has been under the joint control of Great Britain and Egypt. For purposes of government the country is divided into fifteen provinces,

with a British governor at the head of each, and these provinces are sub-divided into districts, under British inspectors and Egyptian or Sudanese *mamurs,* or sub-magistrates. Tribal law and custom are administered by native chiefs recognized by Government, but there is always appeal from their decisions to a government official.

The Founding of the Gordon Memorial Mission

During his lifetime Gordon was in close sympathy with the work of the C.M.S., and expressed a strong desire that the Society should take up work in the Sudan. The pagan tribes to the south had been specially near his heart, but although C.M.S. was anxious to found a mission among them, it was not until nineteen years after Gordon's death that the way was opened for work to begin.[1] In 1904, Lord Cromer (British representative in Egypt) offered the Society a definite sphere of work. The offer was accepted; the Committee issued an appeal for men and funds which met with a ready response, and in December, 1905, a party of missionaries left Khartoum to found the Gordon Memorial Mission in the Southern Sudan. The party was under the temporary leadership of the Rev. Ll. H. Gwynne, who is now Bishop in Egypt and the Sudan.

The Country

The district allotted to the C.M.S. by Lord Cromer is that part of the Sudan which stretches along the White Nile from the south of the Sobat River to the borders of Uganda, and lies partly in the Mongalla and partly in the Bahr el Ghazal Province. It covers an area rather larger than that of the British Isles, and its inhabitants belong to at least twenty-four different tribes, each speaking its own language. The C.M.S. work has been chiefly among

[1] This paper deals exclusively with the C.M.S. Mission among the pagan tribes in the south. An account of the work in the Northern Sudan is given in a most interesting pamphlet, "The C.M.S. in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan," by Canon W. H. T. Gairdner, published by the Church Missionary Society, Salisbury Square, E.C.4, price 4d.

two of these tribes—the Dinkas (or Jieng) who inhabit the northern part of Mongalla Province and the north-east of the Bahr el Ghazal Province, and the Azandi, whose country extends from the southern part of the Bahr el Ghazal away to the French and Belgian Congo; but stations have lately been opened among two other tribes.

The Dinka country is thickly covered with bush and forest, and in places the grass towers above the heads of those walking along the narrow, winding paths. During the wet season, from April to October, the whole country is a vast swamp, while from November to March water is so scarce that the water-holes are covered with branches, and a man is always on guard over them.

Twenty-six centuries ago, Isaiah spoke of this country as "the land of the rustling of wings" (Isaiah xviii. 1, R.V.), and the description is as true to-day as in those long-past ages, for the air is filled with the sound of the wings of numberless insects and birds. Everywhere one goes, great flocks of the latter line the banks of river and lake—storks, flamingos, cranes, pelicans, and many others, as well as myriads of smaller birds, and at migrating times the swish of their wings is heard almost continuously.

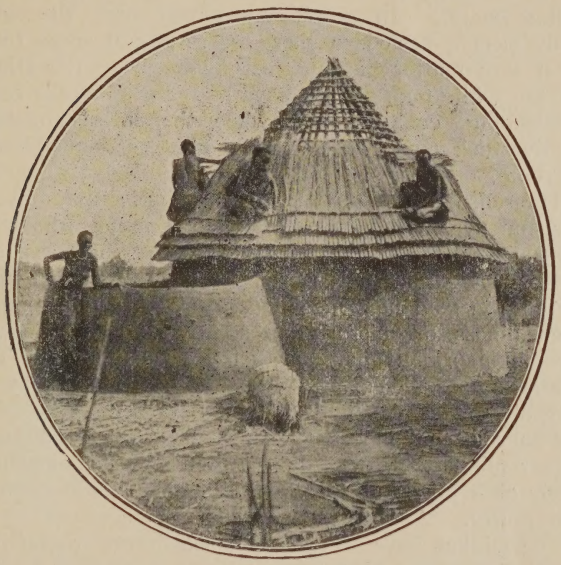
Wild animals of all kinds abound, and incidentally help to provide work for the mission dispensaries. Insects play a large part in the life of the missionary, especially white ants and mosquitos, for the former eat his boots, books, and boxes, and the latter make life a burden to white man and Dinka alike.

The People

The Dinkas are a fine, tall race, with long legs, well adapted for crossing swamps! A favourite attitude of the Dinkas is standing on one leg, like a stork; they seem to find this position restful, and will often remain in it for a long time. Another peculiarity is that they are minus four front teeth, which have been forced out with a fishing spear during childhood; this causes them to

speak indistinctly, and adds much to the missionaries' difficulties when learning the language.

The ordinary dress of the Dinkas is scanty, consisting of clay and ashes smeared over their bodies, and a



JIENG WOMEN THATCHING A NATIVE HUT

bead necklace or belt; but for festive occasions, such as dances, the young men deck themselves in leopard skins and feathers, and adorn their faces with streaks of white ashes. The married women usually wear dressed sheepskins round their waists, and the height of their ambition is to possess a piece of dyed cotton material to fold round their shoulders. They wear many heavy iron anklets and brass bracelets, and red earth is much fancied for putting on their bodies, and, mixed with grease, for hairdressing purposes.

The Dinka huts are shaped like round haystacks, with walls of mud mixed with chopped grass, and high sloping

thatched roofs. They have no windows or chimneys, and the doorway is so low that it can only be entered by crawling on hands and knees. The furniture usually consists of a skin (which serves as a bed), an earthen pot for cooking, and a few hollowed and dried gourds for holding water. In these one-roomed huts the whole family sleeps, besides a sheep or goat and some fowls, and it is a matter of much astonishment to the Dinkas that the white man should have so many different rooms for sleeping, cooking, etc., when the entire household and livestock could be so comfortably accommodated in one room.

The religion of the Dinkas is animistic; they have no idols, but live in constant fear of malignant spirits which they believe to inhabit the trees, houses, wilderness, etc., and to which they offer sacrifice. They are much under the influence of their medicine men, and witchcraft (to which illness or misfortune of any kind is attributed) plays an enormous part in their everyday lives. They have a vague belief in a supreme Being, whom they call Deng-dit, or Nyalic, and to whom on certain occasions they sacrifice a bullock, but this Being is not connected in their minds with goodness or love, but is looked upon merely as a powerful spirit who sends them misfortunes when angry.

The Dinkas have no idea of unselfishness or gratitude, and when they hear for the first time the story of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross, they are often frankly incredulous, and treat it as one of the queer notions of the queer white people. "Whoever would do such a thing for another? No one, of course." Incidentally, this inability to understand self-sacrifice is a contributing factor to the distrust with which missionaries are at first regarded. "If the white man speaks truth when he says that his land is a good land, with plenty of food and many cows, why did he leave it and come to live with us? It must be that he wants to get something out of us."

In character the Dinka is indolent and unenterprising, completely satisfied with himself and his attainments, and with no apparent wish for, or interest in, anything higher.

He has few vices, and until middle life, when his intellect is apt to become clouded through too much squatting in the sun thinking of nothing at all, he is a cheerful, good-natured soul. At his best he is very lovable, and many of the Dinka boys trained in the mission schools have proved not only quick and intelligent, but capable of keeping true to their Christian ideals in spite of the contempt and ridicule of their non-Christian neighbours.

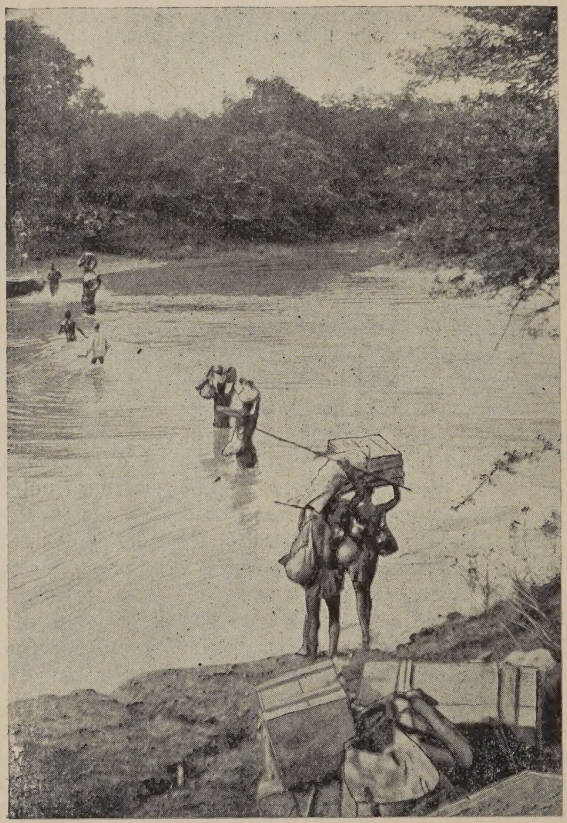
There is a good deal of difference between the manner of life of the riverside Dinkas and that of their brethren farther inland. Those living on the river bank subsist mainly by fishing, which is carried on by spearing the fish and by setting traps. The men frequently spend the whole night in fishing, using a light to attract the fish. Even when not so engaged, these Dinkas sleep little at night, and the entire population of a village may often be seen squatting round their smoky fires, chatting and switching away the mosquitos with bunches of twigs. This may partly account for their inertness and distaste for work during the day. At certain seasons of the year, when fish is scarce, the riverside Dinkas are brought to the verge of starvation, for they seem to have no idea of obtaining food by other means, such as the snaring of animals. They subsist at these times on an unsatisfying diet of memories of past meals, hopes of more in the future, and water-lily seeds.

The inland Dinkas are far more industrious than those living by the river. The former cultivate *durra* (native corn) with some success, although the uncertain rainfall, combined with their inborn tiredness and a strong temptation to eat the seed corn, prevents their getting very plentiful crops.

Their chief industry, however, is the raising of fine cattle, for which they are famous throughout the Sudan. Any one wishing to open conversation with a Bor Dinka cannot do better than talk about cattle, and it is not the Dinka who will tire of the subject first. Their interest in their cattle amounts to a passion, and for them they will go through any amount of hardship and even danger.

The women of the Bor Dinkas lead a fairly busy life,

for it is on them that most of the hard work falls. Theirs it is to fetch the water, collect the firewood, milk the cows, pound and cook the durra, work in the fields and thatch the huts, and so long as they are useful to the men they are well treated, and have quite a large amount of influence (not always for good) over their men folk. A man may have as many wives as he can afford to buy, usually paying for them in cattle or sheep.



CROSSING A RIVER IN THE DINKA COUNTRY

The Azandi (or Niam Niam, "great eaters," as they are called by the Arabs, on account of their former cannibalism) are more enterprising than the Dinkas, but are also less moral and reliable. They are a go-ahead race, anxious to become civilized. Like the Dinkas, they are much under the influence of witchcraft.

Their country consists almost entirely of forest, and they have no villages, but each man clears a space which he tills and plants, builds huts for himself and his family, and settles down for two or three years. At the end of that time, as he does not plough or manure, the soil has lost its fertility, and he moves to another spot and goes through the same performance again.

In appearance the Azandi are striking. They all have the two incisor teeth filed to a sharp point; it is also their custom to cut marks on their faces and bodies, and to decorate themselves with various patterns made with black gardenia juice. These patterns give wide scope for the exercise of individual taste and originality. In a crowd of Azandi one may see many different designs—a ring round one eye or both, diagonals, wavy lines, blots as of ink, and some have "marbled" bodies. Much time is spent by both men and women in hairdressing, and the fashions constantly change. The men carry small knives in leather sheaths, and a spear. Twenty spears will buy one wife, and a man's wealth is estimated by the number of spears or wives he possesses.

The Azandi are far more responsive to Christian teaching than the Dinkas, but there is a very real danger that in their eagerness for anything that seems to lead towards civilization many of them will adopt the religion of the Arab traders from Omdurman and Khartoum, who are going among them in ever-increasing numbers.

A Pioneer Mission

When the pioneer missionaries began work in the Southern Sudan in 1905 the first station that they opened was at Melwal, seven miles south of the government station at Bor, and about 1000 miles from Khartoum.

Within a few months they occupied Gwalla, ten miles from the river, and Malek, five miles south of Melwal, where a dispensary was opened (which at first, however, attracted but few patients). But it was not long before the stations at Bor and Melwal had to be abandoned, because the missionaries in charge of them had either been invalided home or transferred to other spheres of work, and only the Rev. A. Shaw was left at Malek. When he came home on furlough in 1908 the work at that station also was in abeyance for several months, but it entered on a new lease of life when he returned, accompanied by Mr. W. H. Scamell. It became evident that the Dinkas had appreciated the work among them more than had been thought, for they began to attend the dispensary in larger numbers and more regularly than before.

The dispensary work proved a most valuable means of getting into touch with the people and winning their confidence (especially as the Dinkas have an unaccountable love for medicine), and also afforded good opportunities for preaching. As the dispensary became more widely known, people would come from long distances, one woman even walking from a village forty miles away, carrying her sick child in a basket on her head; and on returning to their own people, would tell of the wonderful new teaching of the white men.

Truly a missionary needs to be "a good all-round man," for many and various are the things he is called upon to do. The labours of the missionaries in the Southern Sudan were made more strenuous by the strong disinclination of the Dinkas to lend a helping hand. The former were very largely their own house builders (not a light matter when one has had no previous training, even though the houses consist only of mud and thatch), and their other activities included painting and repairing the mission boats, cooking, cutting out and making primitive garments for their Dinka "house boys," mending their own clothes and washing and ironing the same when necessary.

The First School

A need which quickly made itself felt was for a school, where such of the people as showed intelligence and a wish to learn might be taught to read. The missionaries, therefore, set about preparing a reading sheet, consisting of the alphabet, Creed, Lord's Prayer, Ten Commandments, and a selection of verses of Scripture. This work they found extremely difficult, for the Dinka language had never been reduced to writing. It is true that a version of St. Luke's Gospel had been published by the British and Foreign Bible Society, but that was found to be based on a more northern dialect than that of the Bor Dinkas, and so was of little use. Nor could the Dinkas themselves be looked upon as satisfactory teachers of their own language, for not only would they allow the would-be learner to continue using a wrong word or expression, but would use it themselves in speaking to him. To give an instance of the difficulty of the situation: one of the translators was in search of an equivalent for "image, likeness," and pointed to a cow made of clay. "Duol," was the reply of his Dinka teacher, referring to the hump on the cow's back. Down it went in the book, and not till some time later was the mistake discovered.

As time went on, industrial work was begun at Malek. The Dinkas were taught brick-making and carpentry; a small printing-press was set up, with which were printed gospels, service books, reading sheets, etc.; and weaving was introduced, with the idea of making it a home industry among the people, and so avoiding the necessity of dependence on Moslem traders.

The progress of these various activities, both evangelistic and educational, has been slow. The Dinkas at first proved very unresponsive, showing no apparent interest in anything except cattle, and having a deep distrust of all new ways and new people. Since the work was begun in 1906 the missionaries have had a hard fight, with many discouragements and much apparently fruitless work. It was not until 1916 that the first Dinka convert was baptized. During the last few years, however, visible progress has been made. Three more

baptisms have recently taken place at Malek, and there is a steady growth of friendliness and trust in the attitude of the people towards the missionaries, and a greater readiness to accept their teaching.

The first confirmation held in the Mission took place at Malek in 1920, when two Dinkas and two Acholis were confirmed by Bishop Gwynne. The church was filled with over 140 people, mostly unclothed, who listened to the address with rapt attention, and eagerly watched every part of the ceremony.

One of the confirmees, Yoane (John), is now in charge of an out-school at Masumbu, and as a result of his work there ten people had been admitted to the catechumenate up to March, 1921. Though quiet and unassuming, he has proved to have great influence over his fellow-countrymen, and is keen and persevering. During school vacations he often carries out itineration tours in the surrounding district.

In 1912 a station was opened at Lau, a huge clearing in the forest, measuring about six miles long by three-and-a-half miles wide, in the centre of a well populated district, about 172 miles north-west of Malek. Here the work is among the Cic Dinkas, who are great cattle owners and agriculturists. The station is on the trade route between Rumbek and the Nile, and therefore occupies a position of strategic importance. The work is on the same lines as that at Malek, but it is now in abeyance, because the missionary in charge has had to be withdrawn for work elsewhere, and there is no one to take his place.

The year 1913 marked the beginning of work among the Azandi at Yambio, some 200 miles south-west of Malek. Progress here has been comparatively rapid, the people being more eager to be taught and quicker to learn than the Dinkas, and possessing none of their conservatism. Some six years after the work was begun the missionary in charge was able to report that there were a number of inquirers, that a beautiful little church had been built, and that the congregation numbered from 200 to 500 on

special occasions. Marked progress had also been made in the school.

A promising feature of the Yambio settlement is an out-station, or extension, now run almost entirely by one of the natives, Hanna, who was one of those confirmed. The people of this village have built themselves a school and huts, and have laid out the grounds in imitation of Yambio, and already there are about fifteen catechumens.

Yei was the next mission station to be opened (1917). The people belong to several different tribes, but the bulk of the population is composed of the Kukwa, a sub-tribe of the Baris. They are eager and quick to learn, and the school of forty-five boys, principally chiefs' sons, is doing splendid work. The school is entirely self-supporting, as the boys have clothes and a certain amount of food provided from their homes, and the rest of the food is grown by themselves. Each of the chiefs of the district has a "town house" at Yei, and occasionally stays there, so that they and their followers have oportunities of attending the services, and this should be a valuable means of making the Gospel known in every chief's village.

THE FIRST SCHOLARS AT YAMBIO

In 1920, at the repeated request of the Government, another important piece of work was undertaken—the opening of a boarding school for chiefs' sons and others at JUBA, ninety-four miles south of Malek. The object of the missionaries is to provide a boarding school with definite Christian influence, so that those boys who wish for higher education need not be sent to the Gordon Memorial College at Khartoum, where the influence is Mohammedan. The school opened with four boys from the Acholi country 100 miles away; the smallest of them arrived with three porters, and a tusk of ivory to pay his school fees! Now there are some forty-five boys, representing seven different tribes. It is hoped that in time the school will be quite self-supporting, for the boys are learning to grow their own corn and other food. Most of them are sons of chiefs, and it is the great hope of the missionaries that when they leave school to take up their chieftainships and other responsible posts, they may go as baptized Christians. There is no better way of forestalling Islam than by winning these leaders of the future for Christ, and fitting them to be teachers and missionaries to their own people.

The First Hospital

Work among the Moru people has lately been begun by Dr. and Mrs. K. G. Fraser, who have opened a medical mission station at YILU, fifteen miles south of Amadi, and about 120 miles south-west of Malek. Dr. Fraser describes it as a lovely spot, right among the hills, and when the official high road, now in course of construction, is finished, it will pass through the station, and will provide ready access for patients from different parts of the country. Dr. Fraser finds the Morus a most cheery and attractive tribe, who are "simply longing for light, and many of them for healing." A temporary hospital has been built, with a ward, operating theatre, general dressing room, and dispensary. The chief of the neighbourhood, who is practically never away from the station, is acting as assistant to Dr. Fraser, and doing very well. Already a number of successful operations and treatments

have established the doctor's reputation throughout the district. A small temporary school has been built, and is well attended.

At OPARI, in the Acholi district, in the extreme south of the Mongalla Province, about 180 miles south-east of Malek, is a school which was opened some years ago for the children of the native police. Until recently it has been carried on by two Acholi Christians, part of a band of twelve from Uganda who volunteered in 1915 for work in the Southern Sudan, and to whose loyal help and faithful witness the Gordon Memorial Mission owes much. Now, however, it has been found advisable to place a European missionary at Opari.

Cross or Crescent?

In the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan a race is being run between the Cross and the Crescent. Unless we at home realize that "the King's business requireth haste" the Crescent will win, for the soldiers of the Crescent are many, and those of the Cross are pitifully few.

All the subordinates working under the British officials are Mohammedans; the local magistrate is almost invariably a Mohammedan, and in that office he is brought into close touch with, and exercises a powerful influence over, the natives in his district. A large number of the people have been recruited into Sudanese battalions and into the native police force, both of which are officered by Mohammedans who are aggressive supporters of their faith. Arab traders are streaming into all parts of the country, spreading the faith of Islam wherever they go.

The pagans do not love the Arabs. They have not yet forgotten the misery and cruelty which they suffered at their hands during the Mahdi rule; yet to them the Mohammedan stands for a civilization but little removed from that of the white men. Although in accepting the faith of Islam they are vaguely conscious of getting only the second best, if the best is not forthcoming, they will embrace any religion that promises social uplift, and Islam is an infinitely easier faith than Christianity.

The Government has decided that the people of the

Sudan must be educated, and is pressing the C.M.S. to open schools in many districts, but if the Society is not able to take advantage of this invitation, what will it mean? The Government will not wait indefinitely.

The great Sudan, which is 3500 miles in length and 600 miles in breadth, and of which the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan forms but a small part, is the largest unevangelized area in the world. Uncounted multitudes of its inhabitants are living as wholly ignorant of Christ as though He had never come to man; the land is still a "land of darkness." God has given us a glorious opportunity of winning the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan for Him, and through it, the vaster region of which it forms a part, but that opportunity is swiftly passing away.

Thirteen missionaries in a district larger than the British Isles, and the Gordon Memorial Fund exhausted! The relief force which England sent out to Gordon arrived too late; let us see to it that we do not wait until it is too late before we send our relief force to the Mission which bears his name.

. . . . . .

Night has fallen in the land of the Dinkas. In a tiny mud hut sits a tired man—one of the pioneer missionaries—finishing a long letter home. For a moment he pauses in his work, then adds a few last words.

"When I began this letter the sun was just setting in magnificent splendour. Suddenly I heard the wail of a woman go up to heaven from across the river. I asked my Dinka boy what it meant, and he told me that a man had died that morning, and his wife was now crying to Deng-dit. The wail continued for some time. I can only tell you that it stirred me more than any missionary meeting at home, and even now as I type this letter I look at my watch in front of me, . . . and I see that at this very moment the great annual C.M.S. gathering is being held in the Albert Hall, and probably thousands are present. . . . Would that they all could hear that cry as I heard it—a cry for help, and what was worse, a cry for hope. They would not stay at home for another missionary meeting unless it was clearly God's will that they should."

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