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REPORT OF COL. H. G. PROUT ON HIS RECONNAISSANCE FROM KHARTOUM TO EL OBEIYAD.

[Translated from Le Moniteur Egyptien of Sept. 19 and 20, 1875.]

War Office, Bureau of General Staff,
Office of the Chief of Staff, Cairo, Egypt.

The following report has been received at the war office:

On May 20, 1875, at 4:45 p. m, with my detachment and a caravan of forty-four camels, I left Om Dourman, the entrepôt of Khartoum. From that time I marched thirteen consecutive days to Khoorsi, six days along the western bank of the White Nile, and seven days west-southwest across country. Of thirteen camps which I made but three were dry and one of these three might have been made at wells, had I chosen to march the caravan nine hours and a-half instead of seven and a-half. The actual marching hours of the caravan from Khartoum to Khoorsi were $89\frac{1}{2}$, which, in thirteen days, gives an average of six hours and 53 minutes a day. The distance from Khoorsi to El Obeiyad is about 69 kilometres; that is to say two days of $9\frac{1}{2}$ hours of marching for a caravan.

[Here follows a tabular statement of the hours of march from camp to camp; also a detailed account of the distribution and characteristics of about 50 wells on the route after leaving the Nile. The last is summed up in the following paragraph.]

From the Nile to El Obeiyad may be found water enough for the actual needs of the route and by digging other wells the water-supply could be considerably increased; but as the wells are generally from 100 to 160 feet deep, the labor in drawing water from them is enormous, and much time is necessary to supply a large party. More valuable results could be obtained in adopting some good mechanical arrangement for raising the water, than in digging more wells. Abundant pasturage for camels exists throughout the whole route from Om Dourman to El Obeiyad; and in its present condition the entire route is quite practical for wheeled vehicles. The first carriages which pass over it should be provided with picks, shovels and axes in order to level the banks of an occasional dry water-course, and to cut a few small trees in the forest of Haschaba. No other work need be done. A railroad could very easily be constructed here. It would require almost no other earthwork than that necessary for drainage. Within a few kilometres of the line fuel for locomotives could be obtained for several years.

From Om Dourman to Tira-el-Hadra (the point where the route leaves the Nile) on the western bank of the river, is a belt of alluvial soil one to six kilometres in width, which is evidently inundated during the high Nile. Back of this is a narrow slope of gravel, which is limited at from three to ten kilometres from the river by low hills; what is west of these hills, whether sandy desert or grassy upland, I cannot say. This strip of alluvium increases in width as one goes south. It seems very fertile, but is not carefully cultivated. When I passed it was not the season of crops, but I saw occasional traces of cotton, more often of *dura* [a sort of millet which seems to be cultivated from Alexandria to the Cape of Good Hope]. Such cotton as I saw had a short, coarse fibre. Here are 800 square kilometres of fertile land, easily watered by short canals, which for want of systematic and organized labor produces but a bare subsistence for a scanty

and savage population. Large herds of fine-looking cattle, and flocks of goats and a few sheep graze in the western hills, and the people are quite wealthy in asses. Everywhere in this region one sees gum-producing acacias, in scattered groups or in low forests, while from time to time one finds groves of magnificent acacias. Villages (*hellas*) are numerous, particularly in the southern half of the route. They are universally huts of dura stalks and herbage, built either in the form of the well-known conical *tokel* or oftener in low small parallelograms.

At Tira-el-Hadra the route finally leaves the Nile, turning west-southwest across the upland. Here, at six kilometres from the Nile, is a permanent lake about two kilometres long and one kilometre wide, and apparently quite shallow. [It will be noticed that the writer does not claim this as a Nile source.] Trees and small islands of land-vegetation are seen in all parts of the lake; I should judge it to be water infiltrated from the Nile, though it evidently receives a contribution directly from the overflow during the high Nile. [Only in Africa would such a pond attract a moment's notice; in Africa water is water.] Here are numerous villages and the usual cultivation of dura and a little cotton. Westward from this point one passes at once into a region uniform in its general aspect from the Nile to El Obeiyad. It is a region of wide undulating plains, covered at this season with long brown grass, and dotted with groups and forests of leafless acacias, in which lurk guinea-fowl and gazelles. At intervals these grassy plains give place to a bare surface of light sandy soil, cultivated during the rains in *dokhu* [a grain much resembling in appearance the cat-tail rush of American swamps, and thriving with extremely little moisture]. Here are found villages of tokels, with wells from 30 to 50 metres deep, where are grouped herds of cattle, sheep and goats.

The agriculture in this region is in the rudest state. As the *khérif* (rainy season) begins, the ground is cleared of dry herbage, the seed is dropped into holes in the soil and covered over, and nature does the rest. The only crop of any importance is dokhu. At times one sees a little cotton, and occasionally a particularly thrifty sheik cultivates a patch of *melochiëh* or *bamiëh*. [Melochiëh is a sort of spinach, bamiëh is the okra of the United States. These are very important items in the food of all classes in Egypt, and, perhaps, wherever the Arabs have penetrated. The bamiëh is dried, and thus preserved throughout the year.] The want of water must forever forbid any progress worth mentioning in the agriculture of this whole region. It is impossible to cultivate anything which will grow and ripen during the three or four rainy months; and even the annual rains are much less certain in quantity and duration than is generally supposed. This want of water must limit, also, the grazing capacity of the country, as herds can never range far from the wells.

The product of gum ought to be considerable, and the red stains of the earth and sand indicate the general presence of iron. About 40 kilometres east of Khoorsi a mine of iron is now worked. The ore (brown hematite) is found in small, irregular pieces imbedded in the sand at a depth of three or four metres.

I hope to be able to collect somewhat accurate statistics of the population and products of this region for a general report on Kardofan.

I arrived at Khoorsi, about 60 kilometres northwest of El Obeiyad, the 1st of June. There I received a letter from Colonel Calston telling me of his extreme illness, and I immediately joined him. Shortly afterwards I took command of his expedition, with which I arrived at El Obeiyad on the 12th of June, 1875. My work subsequent to June 1, will, therefore, form a part of the general report of the operations during the reconnaissance in Kardofan.

H. G. PROUT,
Colonel of Engineers.