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NOTE.—There are many subjects in Africa, such as Racial Characteristics, Political and Industrial Conditions, Labour, Disease, Currency, Banking, Education, and so on, about which information is imperfect and opinion divided. On none of these complicated and difficult questions has Science said the last word. Under these circumstances it has been considered best to allow those competent to form an opinion to express freely in this Journal the conclusions at which they themselves have arrived. *It must be clearly understood that the object of the Journal is to gather information, and that each writer must be held responsible for his own views.*

LAKE CHAD¹

I PROPOSE to give you a short account of the work of our expedition on Lake Chad, but before commencing I think it would be as well to refresh your memory with a brief summary of previous explorations.

The first European to reach the shores of Lake Chad was Major Denham in the years 1822–1824, and to him we owe our first knowledge of the Lake and the general idea of its shape.

Then some years later, in 1854, the expedition of Richardson and Barth coming from Tripoli through the Sahara arrived on the western shores.

But our geographical knowledge of the Lake was not greatly increased. Barth, a traveller after the heart of Burton, obtained his information mostly in the booths and stalls of the market-place. His companion, Overweg, navigated a small portion of the Lake, but a great deal of the

¹ Read before the African Society on February 17th, 1908.

knowledge gained was lost to science by his untimely death near its shores.

Then a year later saw the more serious work of Vogel, who followed Barth and Overweg's route along the western shore-line.

In 1870, the great German traveller, Nachtigal, the last, it may be said, of the Chad pioneers, explored the western and northern parts.

Following upon these pioneers in 1898, the Lake became the centre of activity for several French expeditions—namely the Foureau-Lamy Mission through the Sahara from Algiers, that of Gentil by the Congo and Ubangui, and the disastrous Voulet-Chanoine expedition from Senegal.

Thus Chad had for years been the goal that had called forth the efforts of rival nations in the race of exploration, and round the subject of this water desert a history could be written of the ambitions of men, of their strength and their weakness, of failure and of success.

Latterly, with the successful occupation of the Shari Region, the French have taken the opportunity of adding much to our knowledge of the Lake, and the names of Foureau, Destenave, Tilho, Audoin and Freydenberg are chiefly identified with the work, and I must not omit to mention the investigation of the southern shore-line by the Anglo-German Boundary Commission in 1903.

But in spite of these efforts, Lake Chad had not yielded up all her secrets; her fish and her birds were still unknown, portions of her shores and many of her islands were undetermined, and her dwellers remained as illusive as herself.

Thus it was that I came under her spell, and Lake Chad was regarded as one of the most important fields for the enterprise of our Expedition.

It was in the evening of October 13th, 1904, that one of the boats of my Expedition was put upon the Lake by Gosling and José Lopes, coming by way of the Yo river. The Yo or Waube is a beautiful little river. All the living green in the country is concentrated along the banks, and very refreshing and unexpected is the sight of the narrow stream with its deep water and clean-cut banks clothed in

bright green, winding so sinuously that it almost seems to be wandering aimlessly through the sandy plain like a river that has lost its way.

At this time I had been delayed at Ibi by an attack of blackwater, and Gosling spent the time while waiting for me in making a collection of the fish of the Lake. His diligence was rewarded by the splendid record of 21 out of the 24 species known to the natives. The most interesting fact that this collection has proved is that the fish of Lake Chad are identical with those of the Nile, thereby proving that a communication must at one time have existed, and that their separation must have been at no great distance of time from a geological point of view.

A few weeks later Gosling returned to the village of Yo up the river to meet me, but news of my brother's illness at Maifoni compelled him to start for that place the day before I arrived. I immediately followed, going by way of the western shore, and it was at a point to the south of Yo that I had my first view of the Lake.

The gaining of the goal of my ambition was marked by a rather strange event. I was lost in contemplation of the broad, silvery expanse of water, when my reverie was rudely disturbed by the sound of shouts and clashes, and on looking in the direction I saw a crowd of men down by the water's edge busily engaged in battle. It was a most lively scene. There were 20 to 30 warriors rushing wildly about and engaging in hand-to-hand combats with spears and shields. The battle was never fought to a finish, for after I had been watching it for a few minutes with keen excitement, a shot rang out in the bush behind. Instantly the heroes scattered, one side disappearing into the reeds and scrub, while the other dashed straight into the water and waded and waded till they faded away in the distance, still wading. Thus was my first impression of the extraordinary shallowness of the Lake realised in a rather strange manner.

To go back a moment before we had emerged from the bush, we had sighted a herd of Kob, and José had turned off to stalk them. It was the report of his shot that had so effectively cleared the battlefield.

My route then took me all along the western shore to a place called Kaddai, where there was a Buduma fish market in those days, and here I first came into touch with the Budumas or lake dwellers, who were friendly and brought me presents of fish. I therefore determined to make this a base for subsequent operations, laying store by the hope of getting help and information from these fisherfolk.

The shore-line between Yo and Kaddai is quite open, frequented by large herds of Senegal Hartebeest, Kob, the Dorcas, red-fronted and dama gazelle. This grassland belt is about one mile and a half wide, and beyond it lie thick woods of mimosa.

All the way the shore-line curves in gentle bay formations, and the lake can be reached without difficulty, for there is hardly any marsh, and the land is firm with a sandy soil.

I now took my way to Maifoni, where the sad event of my brother's illness and death delayed the expedition for some weeks.

It was in November that Talbot and I returned by way of Kukawa and Kowa, striking the Lake at a point some 10 miles to the south of Kaddai. All this country is thickly covered with euphorbia or "maio" bush as it is called by the natives. The plant grows to a height of about 5ft. and has opaque blue-grey leaves and pods the size of large pears which burst as we brushed through the thickets, splashing us and our horses with a sticky white juice rather like rubber.

Eventually we reached the Lake at a point about 10 miles south of Kaddai, but though we were on it, we could not see the water owing to the thick belts of maria growing in the shallows of the Lake. They were billowy in form, of a beautiful tender green, and so compact that they gave rather the appearance of topiary work. Here and there one saw a hole in the undulations, caused by elephants rolling.

The maria or ambatch is a slender tree with small leaves of a very dark green. It attains a height of 30ft., and though the wood is strong, it is of extraordinary lightness. The combined qualities render it extremely useful for boat-poles, and the Budumas take advantage of its cork-like lightness for making their shields and floats for their nets. This

reminds me that the wag among our boys, Dumbornu by name, found it also lent itself to practical joking. He went out one day to collect wood for the fires from a mass of maria bush which had been broken down by elephants. Presently he returned to obtain help to carry the wood in. The first man who saw the huge fagot that Dumbornu had collected refused, saying that it would break his back, but with persuasion and pretence of help he was induced to give a heave at it, when it flew up like a bundle of feathers, which put the whole camp into roars of laughter.

The character of the landscape along the route did not vary—the way always led between the belts of bush upon the land and the maria thickets fringing the hidden Lake.

On nearing Kaddai, the maria gave way, and we came within open view of the Lake, whose great expanse of water stretched as far as the eye could reach, and was only broken by a few distant islands blurred to phantoms by the mirage.

At Kaddai we found José had brought down one of the boats from Yo, and a camp had been established, but the Budumas, on whose help we had counted, had disappeared.

At this time Gosling was at Yo completing his collection. Meanwhile Talbot and I took a voyage on the Lake starting on December 8th.

For the first day we held a north-easterly course, hugging the reed-belts on our right and always seeking for a way through; for our object was to gain the Shari mouth. Also we had hopes of falling in with Budumas who might act as guides, but the whole day was spent in fruitless attempts to get through the reeds; what appeared firm islands were merely clusters of reed beds, and the only canoes we came upon were deserted on our approach by their owners, who drew their boats into the reeds and disappeared.

There was a very mystery brooding over the place that seemed to have thrown an enchantment on its waters and peopled its islands with spirits from the shadow world. In a single night, and without the reinforcements of the rain, the Lake will march up at the call of the east wind and subdue the land for half a mile, or, in a few hours sink so fast that numbers of great fish are left stranded. Nor can one

believe in the reality of the shy lake-dwellers, who, on sight of our approach, move in their canoes like shadows across the twilight, dive into the Lake, and disappear never to be seen by us again. Nor is the mysterious feeling ever absent. Even in after days, when we had gained the confidence of the Budumas, I can remember how in the evening light the tall prow of a canoe, piled high with the white slabs of potash or hung with the gross forms of gigantic fish, empty of human souls as a phantom ship, and seemingly moved by no earthly power, would loom up in the western glow and silently pass, to fade in the mists beyond. Without foreknowledge one would not have discovered the small dark dot of the head of the swimmer who was pushing the canoe from behind.

That first night spent by us on the Lake was far from being a happy one. I record the fact merely because it happened to be the first and not because it differed in any great degree from the nights that were to follow.

All night we were a prey to swarms of mosquitoes. We longed for the morning to break, but no rest came with the rising sun, for clouds of flies tormented us, attacking us with a heavy bite which compared with that of mosquitoes was as the hack of a butcher's dirty knife compared with the clean rapier thrust of a gentleman.

On the third day we sighted land, which we took to be a large island judging by the distance we had come on the map. And our hopes were raised by seeing huts, which turned out to be deserted cattle-stations. We found it impossible to land owing to the mud, so we continued our course till by the end of a week our provisions had run out, and hunger forced us to hunt for rats which abound on the islands. We dug them out of their holes and made humble-pie of them. And this is how we lived for another six days. The shore-line kept forcing our course to the north, so realising the hopelessness of continuing, we changed our course to west and emerging into open water sailed for the Yo mouth. On the way we met a large Buduma fleet, which we overhauled owing to the superior pace our sail gave us. They abandoned their flight and hove to, and their chief

came forward to greet us. The men were a fine-looking lot, of heavy muscular build, very glossy of skin, as are all Budumas from their habit of anointing themselves with fish oil as a protection against the harmful effects of their long immersions. Their canoes are made of thick bundles of dry reeds tied together and turned up at the prow, and are most picturesque.

After the loneliness of the Lake, the Yo mouth presented a wonderful contrast. As we sailed into the deeper water of the basin, we could see green trees beyond the level of burnt-up grass and sand, where there were herds of cattle and flocks of sheep with their shepherds.

Against the island sandbanks, which lie across the mouth of the river, rows of canoes were riding between piles like gondolas; and on the islands the owners worked in little groups drying fish and mending nets. This was the time of the great fish harvest, for the river was fast emptying itself and thousands of fish were coming down daily into the Lake. Here and there in the water were naked fishermen, their skins shining like wet bronze in the sun as they waded up and down with spears poised aloft for the throw. There were feathered fishers as well upon the scene, and it was a wonderful sight to watch the scores of pelicans swimming about in ordered phalanxes and stabbing right and left with their great bills into the water, which churned and hissed under the strokes of their gigantic wings.

The Yo mouth is the most important fishing station in the northern portion of the Lake, and the fish after being dried on the islands is carried up to the Yo market some two miles distant. It was here that José when collecting oxen once witnessed a Tubu raid.

These people are the nomad robbers of the Sahara. Armed with long spears and mounted on small ponies and camels, they cover long distances, concentrating suddenly when a raid is contemplated, afterwards to scatter and as quickly disappear. Many of the lawless Mobbur are their worthy allies, acting as spies and sharing a portion of the spoils.

José was sitting under a tree just outside the thick of the crowd when suddenly the cry of Tubu was raised. In an

instant the market was in an uproar, and the people fled in all directions, overturning the stalls. Above the din rose the screams of women and children, many of whom fell in their flight and were trampled upon. Then into the midst of the terror-stricken mob a band of about 100 Tubu horsemen charged furiously. It was a wonderful sight to see a man in almost one movement throw his spear into the air, catch it, and send it hurtling into the back of a flying victim. Meanwhile their allies, the Mobburs, who had been hanging about handy to the horses and cattle all day, cut their tethers and drove off the plunder unobserved in the general confusion.

From the Yo mouth we left by the old route for Kaddai, where we spent Christmas.

On the way we came upon large numbers of dead fish floating upon the water, which we learnt from the Budumas were the victims of a stinging fish.

On February 23rd I made my second attempt to cross the Lake to the Shari. This time I determined to try and follow the influence of the Yo river, so we retraced our course along the western shore. On the way we sighted a herd of 60 hippopotami. They were a grand sight, and such a number of giant outlandish beasts seemed at once to lift the Lake into the region of fable.

The Budumas kill them with spears and cut up the hides into strips, making them into shamboks, which are valuable articles of trade in the markets of Bornu.

From Yo we took a northerly course, now and then coming upon parties of Budumas fishing, and we managed to press two boys into our service as guides; but they professed profound ignorance of the Lake and proved quite useless. Two days later they gave us the slip in the night, taking with them the blankets of two of the men. We were all astonished, for there were their footsteps in the mud where our men had waded to the chest, so that they had run over the mud like moor-hens.

Soon after this we found ourselves in difficulties for want of water, the men often wading and pushing up to their chests in mud.

My troubles were increased by the Harmattan wind. It

would rise daily at 9 a.m.; and by 12 o'clock the sun would be blotted out by a dense, damp mist, through which we had to grope our way, miserably cold. To show how strangely the water shifts with the wind, one morning, in retracing our course of the evening before, we found the water had gone, leaving numbers of fish of enormous size, some four feet long, stranded. As I could find no passage southward, and my men were worked out, I decided to retrace my route to Kaddai and refit for another attempt.

On March 3rd I took the same course as our first, again determining to find a south-west passage, but the reeds still proved impassable. On the outward journey we came upon a large Buduma fishing fleet. At first they mistook us for other Budumas, whom they considered as easy prey; for it is their habit to plunder one another when they get the chance. Accordingly, they closed up ready for attack. But soon they realised their mistake, and the tables were turned. Before we could get up to them, many of the boats burst into flames, and the Budumas, swimming like otters beneath the water, disappeared into the reeds. Hidden in the boats we found four slave-boys, who were the victims of a traffic carried on between the Budumas and Tubus. They were in a shocking condition, and we took them back and released them at Kaddai. The Budumas are well known for their traffic in slaves. The Tubus and Mobburs are their chief accomplices, selling the boys to them for dollars which the latter get in return for their dried fish.

Owing to their elusive habits and mysterious surroundings, the people of Bornu regard the Lake dwellers as uncanny and dreadful. Their island retreats are so secure among the masses of reeds that very little is known of them. Even the great conquerors Rabeh and Faderella, who subdued all the surrounding tribes, left the Budumas to themselves. Consequently the shroud of mystery that envelops them is embroidered with many weird fables. Mothers tell their naughty children that they will sell them to the Budumas, who are believed to live under the water and are said to worship the Spirit of the Lake in a great water snake which dwells therein.

We then determined to try and cut through the reeds.

We worked steadily for two days, cutting a distance of about 800 yards, and beyond that I waded a mile, but there was no end to the reeds and "maria" bush.

I now relinquished this, my third attempt, and once more returned to Kaddai. When within half a mile of the shore we found the water had disappeared, and, as it was late, the men slept in the boats. My bed was put up in 6 inches of water, and that night I slept on the floor of the Lake. In the morning the water rose earlier than I did, and I had just time to get out of bed as the Lake was getting in.

I then abandoned Kaddai as a starting-point, and trekked with the boats' sections a distance of 25 miles to Seyurum, which was the next point to the south where there was open water. This took me a month and a half, owing to desertion and sickness.

Seyurum is a Buduma fish market, and is situated on a promontory which Barth in 1854 records as an island. But the configuration of the ground between the point and the mainland is such that in time of flood the water would come round and very soon isolate the headland. The Lake here is known as "Khi-bul," meaning white water—for the water is very clear and pleasant to drink and altogether devoid of potash.

From Seyurum I made my fourth and last attempt, which necessitated three days' cutting through great belts of reeds, papyrus, and maria bush, which extended as far as the eye could reach.

We were obliged to spend the nights huddled up in the boats. Sleep was out of the question, owing to the hordes of mosquitoes. Many of the men preferred to sit up to their necks in water all night.

I must not overstate our privations, for there were welcome moments of release for some of us. For instance, one morning after a sleepless night myself, I found that two of the boys had been enjoying luxurious repose upon feather-beds, for I discovered to my dismay that two young ostriches, which I was carefully keeping, in the hope of bringing them home alive, were squashed as flat as pancakes under their tired bodies.

Making a cutting through reeds.—LAKE CHAD.

Kanembu Shepherds.

[To face page 234.]

In spite of all the mosquitoes, I never suffered a day's fever on the Lake. There is not a doubt that the Lake Region is a white man's country. The rains are never heavy, and the desert character of the soil produces quick evaporation. During the dry season, from the middle of October to the end of April, when the Harmattan prevails, there is a delightful freshness in the air and the nights are beautifully cool, the thermometer registering as low as 43° in the early hours of the morning.

The hottest month is May, but even then, as the heat is dry, I never found it unbearable, although there were days when I registered 120° on the Lake itself.

On getting through the reeds, we found a depth of 5 feet and the aspect of the Lake quite different from that of the Yo basin. Instead of low islands, there were big island stretches, which formed continued promontories ahead, overlapping one another on either side of our course, with channels sometimes not more than 100 yards wide—at other times forming deep bays as much as two miles in width, lined with belts of dark green maria 10 to 30 feet in height.

Up to this time the Budumas had held severely aloof, but now a Kachella or Chief of a large fishing fleet we met saluted us and offered to show us the way to the other side. On the way he took us to his island Karra-ragga, where we rested for two days.

This island presented a very fertile appearance; the delicate green of young mimosa leaf was a pleasant sight after the sand-swept stretches of Bornu, and large herds of cattle were to be seen on the island.

The Kachella's town consisted of reed huts. Each dwelling had its low, round mosquito-proof house covered with close-woven matting.

The Budumas have a language of their own, but they all speak Kanuri. The men are tall, often over 6 feet in height, with well-developed heads, high foreheads, and blunt noses. They are divided into many separate communities. Each of these is ruled by a Kachella—and all are under a King, who is called the Karammi.

The women are small, and in features like the Kanembus.

There is not a doubt the Budumas and Kanembu people both came from Kanem, and the similarity of their types is due to a common origin, and is further strengthened by inter-marriage.

On leaving the island I went to Wunnda on the east side of the Lake, thence followed the shore to the mouth of the Shari. Round the south-east corner of the Lake the country becomes marshy in a depression that was once the mouth of the Bahr-el-Ghazal—a river that has been choked by marsh and the drifts of sand blown westwards from the Soudan.

We were now following a path through the reeds, once cut by the Kuri for the French, who use it as a means of communication by water between the Shari and their station at Bul.

About 12 miles before reaching the Shari mouth, one leaves the great sombre maria belts behind and comes out into magnificent open water, where Chad for the first time assumes the grandeur of a Lake.

Before leaving Chad I will attempt to give a general idea of the Lake, based upon the observations I was able to make. There is an idea that the Lake is drying up; but, except for the loss of the water from the Bahr-el-Ghazal river, which has been choked in the sands, and a certain amount of decrease in the volume of water from the Yo owing to its being deflected into backwaters by native fishing dams, my opinion is that, geologically speaking, it does not alter so rapidly as has been supposed. I believe that the supposed former greater area is largely due to inaccurate survey, and also partly to the fact that the villages on the Bornu side are several miles distant from the Lake, which has given the impression that these determined a former shore-line. But I think that the sole reason for their position is one of security, for, as there are no containing banks, and the land is almost level with the water, the Harmattan, which causes the water to flow 600 yards over the land with an ordinary wind, drives it two miles when the wind is strong.

I was told by the Lowan of Kowa, which is situated five miles from the Lake, that in a great flood twenty years ago,

the water had reached the town, and in another, seven years ago, it had risen past it and covered the plain as far as a place called Mongonu. While the floods lasted, the Budumas went up in their boats and established a fish market just outside Kowa. Again, to take another example. Barth in 1854 relates how a town called Ngornu,¹ some ten miles from the Lake, was suddenly half destroyed by flood.

Now on the eastern shore, where there are good banks, for the most part, and the water is not influenced by the prevailing wind, many villages lie close to the Lake.

The fact that I found a channel, used by the French in 1902, along the east coast to Ngigni on the north, impassable two years later, might be taken as evidence that the Lake is drying up. But so swift a shrinkage as this would imply is incredible, and it is most probable that there was more water than usual in the Lake in 1902, owing to flood.

Another fact which has perhaps created the impression that the Lake is decreasing is that chains of islands once separate are now more or less joined together by marsh. But I think this may very likely be due to the silting up of mud and sand against the obstruction of the islands by the opposing influences of the Yo and Shari, the two rivers that feed the Lake. In fact, my observations go to show that the Lake is two lakes, divided by the fifteen miles or so of marsh and maria bush that I attempted to cut through, thus forming the separate basins of the two rivers. Moreover, the Buduma Kachella told me that there was no communication between the two parts, and I found that the people on the different sides knew little of each other.

This theory is further borne out by the very marked difference in the character of the scenery and of the people. On the north the shores are flat and bare, and the water, nowhere more than 4 feet deep, is broken up by innumerable small uninhabited islands which are little more than sand-flats. The people are few and poor, and lead a more or less piratical, lawless existence.

¹ Probably a different way of spelling the name already mentioned. It is called "Angornou" by Denham and Clapperton, and described as "a few miles from the Tchad."—ED.

But in the south, or Shari basin, everything has a more flourishing appearance. The depth of the water is from 5 to 9 feet, and the islands, which form prominent features, are fertile and thickly inhabited. Everywhere the maria tree grows luxuriantly, and its close, dark foliage gives a very sombre character to the scenery. This is the real home of the Budumas, who are a prosperous people, gaining their wealth by fish and potash, and counting it in slaves and herds of cattle.

BOYD ALEXANDER.