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Fifty Years of Nile Exploration, and Some of Its Results: Discussion

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required before a selection can be made. Meanwhile, powerful dredgers have been ordered, with a view to experimenting on the best method of increasing the waterway. Should the result of such a project be successful, the entire remaining area, in Egypt, now under basin cultivation, will receive the benefit of perennial irrigation. Lastly, the River Gash, that impetuous and intermittent torrent of the Eastern Sudan, will shortly be controlled and regulated, by a series of works, so as to permit the fertile province of Kassala to reap the fullest advantage from its floods.

One more point is worthy of mention in the record of progress. To my mind, among the most striking results of English administration in the Nile basin, during the last ten years, are the marvellous facilities that now exist for locomotion. Ten years ago, the traveller, in the Sudan or in Uganda, had no other means of transport at his disposal than the camel, the donkey, the native porter, or the canoe. Now, through a considerable part of both countries, he can, if he travels by land, make use of a *train de luxe*, provided with every modern appliance, or if by water, in a comfortable steamer. Again, it is remarkable how, in the last few years, postal communication has been abridged. Khartum is now within eight days of London, the Victoria Nyanza and the Nile outlet within a month. When I remember my first visit to the upper Nile in 1899, and the state of things then existing, I find it difficult to realize how rapidly all these changes have been effected. The above merely gives an outline of the progress that has been made. I venture to assert that it constitutes a splendid record. These results have only been attained by much labour and self-sacrificing effort on the part of those who have been instrumental in obtaining them. Many valuable lives have been lost in the struggle, the toll exacted by the Nile God for the invasion of his sanctuary.

I feel confident that in the future, as in the past, Englishmen will always be found ready to bear their share in the great work—commenced by Speke, and carried on by Baker, Gordon, Stanley, and their successors—of completing our knowledge of the Nile, of endeavouring to improve the material condition of the inhabitants of its valley, and, at the same time, bestowing upon them the blessing of good government.

These are tasks worthy of comparison with any that have been recorded in history, and which, if accomplished, even in part, will constitute a monument to the work of the great explorers, worthy of their names, and more enduring than any of those erected by an earlier civilization in the valley of the Nile.

The PRESIDENT (before the paper): My first duty is to read the following letter from Lord Cromer:—

“DEAR MAJOR DARWIN,—

“If, as I fear will be the case, I should be unable to attend the meeting to-night, I shall be very much obliged to you if you will express to the

meeting how greatly I regret my enforced absence. I have had the advantage of reading a proof of Sir William Garstin's paper. The only criticism I have to make upon it is that with characteristic modesty he has scarcely done justice to himself. The discoverers—Burton, Speke, Baker, and others—showed us what the Nile was. It required the help of a highly trained hydraulic engineer to turn the discovery to account.

"As has so often happened in the history of our country, when the occasion arose the man was forthcoming. He was Sir William Garstin. It is impossible for me to speak too highly of the services rendered by Sir William Garstin in Egypt and the Sudan, and I very greatly regret that I cannot be present to testify my high appreciation of those services.

"Very sincerely yours,

"CROMER."

The PRESIDENT, introducing the speaker, said that on July 30, 1858, the celebrated explorer Speke first saw the waters of Victoria Nyanza, and thus solved the riddle of the Nile, a riddle which had puzzled geographers for many centuries. It was certainly a jubilee which ought not to be forgotten for many reasons. In the first place, Speke's discovery was one of the greatest geographical achievements of that century—a century so full of striking geographical events. When that discovery was made it was impossible to foretell that it would have more importance to the United Kingdom than to any other European country, because at that time our connection with the Sudan, Uganda, and Egypt was hidden in the mists of the future. At present we could not forget that the Nile—that mighty river—and nearly all its tributaries passed through countries which were under British dominion, or where our political influence was predominant. Then, again, the discoveries were made by Englishmen—he said Englishmen, because there were many names which ought to be mentioned besides the great name of Speke. They ought never to forget the name of Burton, because he was, after all, the leader of the expedition from which Speke was detached when he made his great discovery. Then there was Grant, who would always be remembered, because he was the faithful companion of Speke in his subsequent journeys. Among those who completed those earlier discoveries the name of Stanley must be mentioned. Another reason for celebrating this event was that the Society was instrumental in sending out those expeditions by which the riddle of the Nile was solved.

Sir COLIN SCOTT-MONCRIEFF: I was not the least prepared for this to-night. I think I may truly say that in this large room there is no single person less of an explorer than I am. But I am sure I have enjoyed very much the interesting lecture given by my dear old friend and colleague Sir William Garstin. It has been a great pleasure to me to hear it. For myself, what can I say? Supposing a foreigner came, we will say, from Russia to England, and learned something about the Thames between Gravesend and Greenwich, would he be justified in going back to Russia and giving a lecture on the Thames? That is the kind of feeling I have. Sir William Garstin has said that for twelve years the Nile was closed to all knowledge—it was during nine of these years that I served in Egypt. I have sometimes thought it a little difficult for people to realize what is the meaning of so many thousand miles. Supposing by some great convulsion of Nature the river Thames should find its way into the Euphrates, and so out into the Persian Gulf, that would be just about the length of the river Nile. To give another comparison: the country watered by the Nile, that is the country commonly known as Egypt, being the narrow strip of the Nile valley from the second cataract to the Mediterranean sea, about 900 miles, that country is only about one and a half times the size of Wales. It is a narrow small valley. Every yard of it is cultivated, and

with all that science can effect it will never be a very large area, the levels of the two sides of the valley prohibiting any great extension of cultivation.

THE PRESIDENT: I do not know whether Sir John Dorington would care to say a few words.

SIR JOHN DORINGTON: I did not expect to be called upon to address this audience when I received the honour of an invitation from the Geographical Society in order to celebrate the Jubilee of Speke, fifty years since he made his great discovery. I married into the Speke family, and knew him well between his first and second expeditions; I knew him after his return from the great success of the Victoria Nyanza. I was rather surprised to hear this evening that there was at any time any doubt at all about the levels of Tanganyika rendering it impossible for the waters of Tanganyika to reach the Nile. Speke had no doubt of that kind at all. If any confidence was to be placed in the boiling temperature registered by thermometers, it was quite certain the waters could not go to the Nile, because through the Austrian missionaries at Gondokoro, we knew very well what the Nile levels were there. He was equally confident that the water he found at what is now the south end of the Victoria Nyanza rendered it highly probable that it went to the Nile, and to prove this was the object of his second expedition which could never have taken place if it had not been for the cordial support that Sir Roderick Murchison and this Society gave to his enterprise. Money and influence was given to him to enable him to start on that expedition which he carried through so well. Although he had a guard of forty men recruited in Zanzibar, armed, and to a certain extent disciplined, and notwithstanding all the perils that he passed through in that long journey for something like three years, he never fired a shot in anger, nor was any outrage committed by any of the men under his control. I remember how we were startled, when we got the telegram from Khartum, "The Nile is settled." It is rather remarkable, that if the sudd had existed in those days as it exists now, Speke might never have reappeared. He could not have waited six months between Gondokoro and Khartum. He never could have outlasted that time, but probably would have perished in those swamps, and we should have known nothing more until Baker returned. How is it, I should like to know, that this sudd trouble, which has been so great of late years, was never apparently encountered by the Austrian missionaries, and has only occurred since the days of Speke—I think he took three weeks from Gondokoro to Khartum. Sad indeed was his death, in the full possession of his faculties, an enterprising and resolute explorer, and suddenly cut off by an accident out shooting. It was a sad termination to an illustrious life. I knew Grant also well, and a more devoted companion and friend no man ever could have had than Speke had in Grant. I am glad to hear that Mrs. Grant is here to share the credit of the enterprise which has been celebrated to-night by the Geographical Society. I thank the Royal Geographical Society very much for having brought back again to the recollection of the world how the discovery of the Nile was made.

Colonel Sir C. M. WATSON: Sir William Garstin's paper has brought back very forcibly to my mind this day thirty-four years ago, when I was on the upper White Nile, or, to speak more correctly, on the Bahr-el-Gebel, at that place which Sir William Garstin showed you a photograph of, measuring the width of the Nile and surveying the river; therefore you can understand that to me this paper is of special interest. There are one or two points I would like to refer to. I do not think Sir William Garstin laid sufficient emphasis on the work which General Gordon did himself. General Gordon had great characteristics, as we all know, but people are not aware that he was a most painstaking and accurate surveyor, and that he was the first to make a really good survey of the Victoria Nile from the

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Albert lake to the Murchison falls, and the Karuma falls, as far as Nyamyongo on the northern borders of Uganda. There is another point concerning him also that I would like to mention. We have heard something about the East African Company and the opening up of the country from the East Coast into the interior, but I think it should never be forgotten that Gordon was the first to propose to open up that route from the East Coast. He realized most fully the difficulties in keeping up his communication with Egypt by that long river, 3000 miles in length, and he considered whether it would not be possible to open up a route from the East Coast of Africa to join the headquarters of the Nile. He wrote a letter to the Khedive, proposing he should send an expedition to Mombasa, to march into the interior and meet a force which he proposed to send down. That expedition was sent by the Khedive. Gordon's idea was that they should go up the Tana river, which Sir George Mackenzie, whom I am glad to see here, knows very well, and that they should join hands with him in the districts to the north of Uganda. The expedition was sent, but for some reason I have never been able to understand, instead of being sent to the Tana river, they were sent to the mouth of the Juba river, which, of course, was no use for opening up communication with the Nile; but, at the same time, the English Government sent to the Khedive to tell him to order his expedition back to Egypt as quickly as possible, because he had no right to interfere with the territories of the Sultan of Zanzibar. Though his proposal came to nothing, we must not forget the share Gordon had in the proposition for opening up the district from the East Coast to the Nile. As regards the White Nile, I would like to say that Sir William Garstin's description of the river is very accurate; it is a very dull and dreary district—in fact, it is almost worse than a London fog. You see nothing but these reeds round you day by day, and it is very difficult to get through on account of this sudd. It is a curious fact that during the time Gordon was administrator of the country, the sudd gave no trouble at all. It was cut through before he went there, and it never closed again until after he had left, and I believe the reason was this, that Gordon was most careful in always keeping up the communication by steamer with Khartum. His theory was that if you could keep one steamer a month going between Khartum and Gondokoro the sudd would not have time to form, and certainly it was proved that his theory was correct, because during the time he was there sudd never formed, but it was not till after he left that it re-formed and entirely stopped the navigation. Gessi, whom Sir William Garstin has alluded to as having made the first survey of the Albert Nyanza, was stopped by this sudd on his way back to Khartum, and of about five hundred men who were with him, no less than four hundred died of starvation on account of the sudd. He got out, but was so utterly broken by the starvation that he died when he got to Suez. That was, I think, the greatest loss of life, due to this terrible sudd, on record. I have kept you too long; and I would only like to express to Sir William Garstin my sincere thanks for this most interesting paper, which perhaps we, who know the Nile by personal experience, can best appreciate.

MR. FRESHFIELD: I respond, sir, to your invitation not without diffidence, for I have no claim to be enrolled in the noble army of martyrs who, as pioneers of religion or of knowledge, have revealed to us the heart of the Dark Continent. I am rather one of that happy band of pilgrims who are carried in a first-class carriage in forty-eight hours across the 700 miles of wilderness which took our fore-runners three months' hard travel to overcome. The Uganda railway has opened the Nile lakes to Cook's tourists, and even brought them within the long vacation tour of a Cabinet Minister. On that great achievement we in this Society may look with particular pride, for the initial step in the planning of the railroad was the journey of Joseph Thomson, and that journey was paid for by the Society and planned

by the foresight of our Council. Thomson's instructions were to seek the shortest way to the great lake, passing between Mounts Kenia and Kilimanjaro. Our Council had grasped the fact that here lay the true key to the control of the Nile sources and much of the commerce of Central Africa.

The African traveller now starts not from the coast, but from the farther shore of Lake Victoria. The region he has to traverse is in many ways a friendly one. Wherever you go in Africa, it seems, unless you aim at virgin peaks or virgin forests, there is a path. I remember how, many years ago, I took Sir H. Johnston up a small but steep Alpine hill. As the zigzags steepened he halted and exclaimed, "Thank heaven, there is nothing like this in Africa." I confess I was puzzled at the time; but now I have been to Africa I quite appreciate the truth of the saying. The dangers and difficulties of African travel are, as a rule, not those of the road. I met a missionary, a padre, travelling with a choice of four modes of progression, a donkey a litter, a bicycle, and his own legs.

My main object, however, to-night is not to generalize on African travel, but to call attention to two points Sir W. Garstin has in the press of matter passed over. The first is the exceptional character of Ruwenzori and its singular position as regards the source of the White Nile. Its range, some 70 miles long and reaching to a height of nearly 17,000 feet, has no connection with any great water-parting. It rises in the middle of the western rift, like an island, or rather like a peninsula, united only at its north-eastern extremity by a relatively low isthmus (about 5000 feet) to the verge of the Uganda highlands. I would ask you to sit with me in imagination on that sudden verge, only an hour's ride from Fort Portal.

At our feet, 3000 feet below, the Semliki falls into the bosom of Lake Albert. Opposite us on its further shore, cape beyond cape, rise the Blue mountains of Beber. (It is a mistake to suppose he saw Ruwenzori. On the south and south-west he saw a water-horizon.) Beside us Ruwenzori juts its rugged lines on to the burnt plain of the Semliki. Behind us lie grassy downs dotted with pools (crater-lakes) filled with blue water-lilies. The water from these pools will flow right round Ruwenzori, first south down the depression on its east flank, through Lakes Ruisamba and Lake Albert Edward (or as, with the King's permission, we may henceforth call it, Lake Edward), and then back north along the Semliki valley till it passes again beneath us to Lake Albert, having made, in a course of nearly 200 miles, the complete tour of Ruwenzori, and gathered up every stream from its forests and its snows to feed the Nile. Of this snowy mother of the Nile there has been a steady tradition through the ages. It has been reserved to our time to prove this tradition well founded. There may be, there are I believe, people who still prefer to think that when Ptolemy wrote of the Nile rising from a snowy mountain, he was simply romancing. There is nothing like the credulousness of incredulity.

I come now to my second point. In his admirable report on the Nile basin. Sir William Garstin has done justice to the scenery of the farthest of the Nile lakes, Lake Edward. But to-night he has obscured its fame. He has spoken of it "as a lonely lake, eternally shrouded in a dense grey canopy of mist"! I once met on the hills of Carrara an Italian sailor who told me he had been in England, "a Londra, dove fa sempre nero"—where it is always night. That is a parallel case of too hasty generalization.

I spent nearly a week on the shores of Lake Edward. I never saw it in a mist. When the rains on Ruwenzori are clearing the air, when the tropical thunderstorms are flying over the waters, the lake enjoys a singularly transparent atmosphere which displays to perfection its noble scenery, for its scenery is noble. I shall not forget the first view of the lake from the grassy downs that lie under Ruwenzori—a sheet of pale-green water stretching away 30 miles or more to where the cones of the

Mfumbiro volcanoes fringed the southern horizon, while on our right steep mountains clothed in green up to their summits sprang abruptly from the shore, and on their upper slopes the smoke columns of native fires rose here and there against a brilliant blue sky. Next I wandered round the cheerful banks of the north-east bay, banks fringed with tropical blooms, as the Thames is with eglantine in June; fishing canoes darted in and out among the islands; a pair of huge white cormorants floating on the surface looked as if they had been put in by a painter to add value to the colours of the landscape. And then, mounting a flowery hill, I looked down on the further side on the broad channel which carries all the eastern waters of Ruwenzori to the lake—when we saw it, a noble river flowing between high banks clothed in tall-stemmed, bright-blossomed trees, over the tops of which rose the blue line of the Ankole uplands. When Mr. Winston Churchill fulfils his promise, and carries on the railroad to Lake Albert, let us hope he will not forget to put a steamer on Lake Edward. It will pay in more senses than one. It is time the British flag was seen on those waters. Finally, Sir Wm. Garstin has expressed a wish for the exploration of the course of the Semliki between Lake Albert and Lake Edward. Surely this has already been accomplished, in great part if not wholly, by Stanley and Dr. Stuhlmann, and more recent travellers and Belgian officials.

Mr. G. F. SCOTT ELLIOT: It is many years since I visited those slopes of Ruwenzori. There is nothing so beautiful in the world as a view over that limitless plain. You may perhaps see a flight of locusts rising far away in the distance, and one can watch them getting nearer and nearer till at last the great mass of them fall on the trees of the forest and you hear the branches break under their weight. There is one point that I should like to know, where is the water which evaporates from these Nile marshes carried to? Is the general direction of the wind towards Ruwenzori, or is it towards the Congo region or to Abyssinia?

The PRESIDENT, in bringing the discussion to a close, said that there were two reasons why he had dwelt especially on the names of Speke, Burton, and Grant. In the first place, this was the jubilee of Speke's great discovery. In the second place the Society had been instrumental in promoting both the Burton and Speke, and the Speke and Grant expeditions. The sums of £750 and £2500 had been granted out of their funds to these two expeditions, though it is true that in each case the money was eventually refunded by the Government. A doubt cannot but be felt whether the Treasury would have been so generous if the expeditions had been failures, and the Society appears to have incurred at least a considerable risk on each occasion. Geography is not usually considered to be one of the moral sciences; but certainly a moral can be plainly drawn from the events discussed to-night. Burton was first in the field in the search for the great lakes; but when by good luck it fell to Speke to actually make the great discovery, Burton unfortunately did not realize its true magnitude, and sought to minimize his work. Speke naturally then felt at liberty to take independent action, with regard to his second expedition. In that second expedition, Speke was accompanied by a man, Captain, afterwards Colonel, James Grant, who never thought of his own reputation, and who consequently won an exceeding bright one. The geographical moral of this story is, that not only is generosity to other explorers right in itself, but also that it pays best in the long run.