WATCH YOUR STEP, KHAWAJA

A British Teacher in Sudan, 1958-1966

Peter Everington

WATCH YOUR STEP, KHAWAJA
A British Teacher in Sudan, 1958-66
Peter Everington

Translation into Arabic: Awad M Elhassan
Design and layout: Fathi Osman

Notes on photographs:
Photographs on page 133 and 134 by Jürg Kobler

Published by:

DAL Group
Khartoum, Sudan
www.dalgroup.com

ISBN 978-99942-0-357-4

Sudan Airways leaving London

INTRODUCTION

By Nureldin Satti

Undoubtedly, many friends and colleagues of the sixties of the last century will welcome this book with a lot of joy and affection. Ustaz Peter Everington was a very popular teacher and I am sure that his students, his friends and all those who know him will be very happy to see that he finally decided to put on paper this amazing account of his longstanding relation with Sudan and the Sudanese.

Peter Everington couldn't have chosen a better time for this endeavour. "Watch Your Step, Khawaja: A British Teacher in Sudan, 1958-1966" comes at a time when there is a lot of introspection about the relationship between the Sudanese and their former colonial masters, the British, and a lot of reminiscing about al-zaman a-jameel (the good old times). Recently, Dr. Hassan Abdin, former Sudan ambassador to the United Kingdom, published his book titled "Sudanese and Englishmen" on the relationship between the Sudanese and their former colonisers, which argues that, while colonisation itself cannot be condoned, many of the colonisers genuinely loved Sudan and worked for the good of its people. Hassan Abdin echoes Peter Everington's words:

> *Many of the British employed in Sudan at that time had discovered it was possible to love another country, not just our own. We realised there were some things to be ashamed of from Britain's past. But the Sudanese also respected many of our countrymen for the good things they had pioneered. Now in the era of Independence a new kind of partnership was open to our country. Those of us who had arrived in our twenties were already marked for life by our experience of a fascinating country.*

In the same vein, the Abdelkarim Mirghani Centre published in 2001 "Khartoum Perspectives", which includes a collection of lectures delivered at the Sudan Cultural Centre by former British administrators who worked in Sudan on their experiences and impressions of their years of service in Sudan. But Peter Everington's book is, however, unique in the sense that it is a first-hand account by a Khawaja (white man) who worked in Sudan in the years that followed the independence of Sudan, and who continued his association with Sudan, in one form or the other, throughout a period that spans six decades.

In 1958, at the age of 23, Peter Everington arrived in the Sudan as a teacher of English language. He fell in love with the country, stayed for eight years, and returned not less than twenty-five times between 1966 and 2016! What better testimony of love of a country which, for many years, has been in the bad books of the international community. Love, forthrightness, humility, "candour and affection" are the central themes of this book. They are also the natural traits and guiding principles of Peter Everington, a practising Christian but also a staunch believer in the shared values of Islam and Christianity. Invoking his relationship with Ahmed El Mahdi, Peter Everington has this to say:

> *I was familiar with this from the Psalmist who wrote, "My heart is fixed." But it was a Muslim who recalled me to my truth, by referring to his truth. As Muslims and Christians, we have important differences. We also share important truths, for*

instance the "fruit of the Spirit" as listed in the New Testament: love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and self-control. Muslim parents at their best try to bring up children with these qualities, as do Christians at their best. We can help each other live these truths, by reference to the One God we both serve. We can also be honest about where we fail. "Compete with each other in good works" is the Islamic teaching. I have had a cheerful comradeship of this kind with Ahmed over the years.

"Watch Your Step, Khawaja" recounts the exciting events that befell Peter Everington from his arrival in Sudan in 1958 to his departure in 1966. Those years comprise defining moments in the post-independence history of the Sudan, probably the most defining ones: Abboud's military coup in November 1958, the first in sub-Saharan Africa, and the October 1964 intifada. While Ustaz Everington arrived two months before the first, he was an eye witness of the second. He was probably one of the rare khawajas who ventured out of their homes to mix with the angry crowd in the streets of Khartoum, to the extent that a child reminds him of his precarious situation: "Ya Khawaja a'mil hisabak" (Khawaja, watch your step). This incident symbolises Peter Everington's relation with the Sudanese society: a disarming (because naturally well-intentioned) and unassuming Khawaja who instinctively believes in the natural goodness of the human lot, and the Sudanese who could read through him and see him, not as a threat, but as a fellow human being who genuinely cares for their welfare.

Since his early youth, Peter Everington was a member of Moral Re-armament (MRA) and his commitment to its ideals has influenced his conduct and shaped his actions. On one occasion, he explains how MRA helped in finding solutions to concrete problems. Referring to his friend Omer El Jak, the cotton classifier, he has this to say:
Moral Re-Armament [at-tasalluh-ul-khuluqi] was the idea Omer and I were trying to apply. The name doesn't matter. In fact, it is now known as Initiatives of Change. The important thing is to find how people of good will, from different traditions, can work together for public benefit.

Other defining events that Peter Everington recounts in his book are those of the building of the Aswan High Dam and the re-settlement (to use a technical term) of the inhabitants of Wadi Halfa, Queen Elizabeth's visit to Sudan in February 1965 and the Round Table conference later that year. Peter Everington deftly intertwines the historical events with his own personal recollections of them, the human relations that he built with some of the main actors and his emotional response to them, sometimes in terms of letters to his parents or of poetry that portrays his feelings as an expatriate in a foreign land, but at the same time his call for a renewed relationship between former coloniser and colonised. His letter to Queen Elizabeth is certainly a masterpiece in that sense.

Most interesting is his relationship with the late Buth Diu and the late Sirr Anai and the positive effect he had on their lives. That episode in the book is an illustration of the healing power of love. The kind of love that knows no boundary or limitations of colour, race or creed. This conviction has been Peter Everington's article of faith and guiding principle throughout his life. It is this that endeared him to all those who knew him and who were touched by his kindness, humility and charm. This was evidenced by the friendly and human relations that he had with many Sudanese families such as that of Daoud Abdel Latif, Dr. Mohamed Ahmed Ali, Omer El Jak, Dr. Murtada Mustafa; and with prominent personalities such as Imam Elhadi, Yahya El Mahdi, Ahmed El Mahdi, Buth Diu, General

Joseph Lagu, Dafaalla El Haj Yusif, Rasheed El Tahir Bakr and Yusif Al Khaleefa Abubakr and many others.

I am sure that those of my generation in Khartoum Secondary School, that of the early years of the sixties of last century, will find themselves in many events referred to in this book. When I arrived at the Khartoum Secondary School in 1961 Ustaz Everington, as we still call him, had been there for a year or so. English has always been one of my favourite subjects and I was very good at it. I was lucky to have had good teachers in Shendi Ahlia intermediate School and Atbara Ahlia Intermediate School. Finding Ustaz Everington at the first year of Khartoum Secondary School was indeed a boon. He made me like the English language even more. I recall that at the end of the first year he gave me a good grade in the English composition paper and he made the following comment in a neat Arabic handwriting: يكتب نثراً واضحاً. This phrase remained stuck in my memory because it is quite unusual for a Khawaja English teacher to make his comments on his students' work in Arabic language, and with such beautiful handwriting.

When I was ambassador to France in the mid-Nineties of last century, Peter Everington came to visit me in the embassy in January 1995 in company of General Joseph Lagu, and introduced me to their colleagues of the MRA office in Paris, Mr. Chavanne and Mr. Lasserre. As usual, they were on a peace-making mission. I facilitated Peter Everington's visit to Sudan that same year, and I was very glad to see that, in 1996, he was awarded the Elnilein Decoration. Two of his former students in Khartoum Secondary School, the President and the Vice-President of the Republic of the Sudan, undoubtedly played their part in that award.

I find myself in many events referred to by Ustaz Everington, particularly the October uprising, the cross-country race and Harambee Africa. Of course, I recall other events which happened during that period: the Abboud military coup, the re-settlement of the Wadi Halfa population, Queen Elizabeth's visit to Sudan, King Faisal's visit to Sudan, Jamal Abdel Nasser's visit, and the Round Table Conference. These are all events which marked my generation and the Sudanese of my age have been impacted by them in some way or the other.

When the October uprising took place, I was in my final year at Khartoum Secondary School, which is next door to the "Barracks", the University of Khartoum dorms. Following the grave events that took place on Wednesday 20 October in the Barracks, as a result of which Ahmed Al-Gorashi was killed by the police, we decided to go on strike and join our brothers and sisters of the university in the uprising. The next day, Thursday, was the day where we did the weekly "cadet" training in an open area adjacent to the school buildings. When the military trainers came to start the training, we refused to obey orders, and left the school to join the demonstrations which had already started in the city centre.

Ustaz Everington's account of the cross-country race resuscitates some fond memories. The biggest cross-country race in those years was the one organised, probably in 1963, on the occasion of the inauguration of the Multi-Sports Complex near Al-Masallamiya bridge. As Ustaz Everington relates in his book, students from various secondary schools, elements from the army and the police and sports teams joined the race. The first twenty slots were won by the team of the army, number twenty-one was Hamad El Neel from our school, and I was number twenty-two. I remember the army team running as a single block, as they used to do in the "jallalas". Hamad El Neel and myself just followed them. What

made things easier for me from a psychological point of view is that I lived in Hay Al Matar, near what used to be called at that time "Hamiyat Al Khartoum" and I used to play football with the military in the football pitch which used to exist at that time, which is now part of the President's residence. I also used to train with my friend Shawgi Izzeldin by running, bare-footed, beyond the buildings of the New Extension, which was still being built at that time.

As to Harambee Africa, I attended the concert that the group gave at the University of Khartoum Students' Union. Ustaz Everington wonders in his book what long-term effect Harambee Africa could have had on the younger generation in Sudan:

> *My eight years with the Ministry of Education came to an end at that time, so I cannot assess the long-term effect of Harambee Africa in Sudan. My impression is that, in a period of civil war and ideological ferment, it provided a joyous vision of what Africans could accomplish together. While that vision remains to be implemented in its fullness, 'Harambee Africa' is still an encouraging memory for those who experienced it.*

I can say that Harambee Africa had a real impact on me and induced me to want to know more about Africa and the world. Fifty-one years after Harambee Africa's visit to Khartoum, I am now living in Nairobi after having served for many years in the East Africa and Great Lakes Regions with the United Nations. It was also probably Harambee Africa's visit to Sudan that induced me to be a diplomat and to learn French and serve in African countries.

Peter Everington embodies the traits and characteristics of young Cambridge and Oxford graduates who used to work in the Sudan: perseverance, commitment and hard work, but not the arrogance of some. Nor does he condone colonialism or imperialism. He expressed his feelings in that respect in the poem that he sent to Queen Elizabeth II during her visit to Sudan in 1965:

> *Where God can speak to the heart of a man and nations obey the call,*
> *Where the wealth of a wondrous earth can be shared for the common use of all,*
> *Where the white or black or brown of a skin Knows only one blood inside,*
> *Red, as the blood of One who lived for all, and for all died.*
> *I know not, Sudan, if I stay or I go*
> *But I vow, having drunk of your waters,*
> *In my English heart, there is ever a place*
> *For all your sons and daughters.*

True to his words, Ustaz Everington still has a place in his heart for the sons and daughters of Sudan. They too, have a place for him in their hearts. For all those who have known him, above all his students and his colleagues, Peter Everington will remain an icon of love and a messenger of hope and peace - a human face of the British Empire.

The book includes an amazing collection of rare pictures taken by the author himself. Graduates of the sixties of the Khartoum Secondary School will be particularly thrilled to find such familiar faces as Sol Yusif, Mr. Oates, Ustaz Girgis Muharib Rizig,(who terrified many students of his chemistry class), as well as the buildings of the old school, demolished to open the way for that necessary evil of modern times, the automobile. The

students of the class that graduated in 1964 should be equally thrilled to find their picture in the book. The same goes to students of the Port Sudan Secondary School and of the Higher Teacher Training Institute.

Peter Everington is to be commended for having kept for posterity such a rare collection of photographs which he took himself and kept in excellent condition.

Finally, DAL Group is to be commended for having made it possible for the general public and for students and friends of Ustaz Peter Everington, to gain access to this most valuable book, that of a Khawaja who did not watch his step, and kept loving Sudan and visiting it come shine or come rain.

Nairobi,
April, 2017

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

In October 1964 a series of strikes and demonstrations compelled the military government of President Ibrahim Abboud to resign. In Khartoum crowds of people poured out into the streets and made their way to the large open space in front of the Republican Palace.

From my flat nearby I walked to observe this outpouring of Sudanese pride and joy, a lone foreigner. In my path stood a man holding a bicycle, with a young boy sitting on the crossbar. As I approached the boy called out, "Ya khawaja, a'mal hisabak - Hey you white European, watch your step!"

This book records some of what I saw and learned during eight years with the Sudan Ministry of Education, 1958-1966. For five years I taught English in Port Sudan and Khartoum Boys Secondary Schools, with short spells of duty in Wad Medani, El Obeid, Aroma and Wau. I was then appointed Lecturer in English at the new Higher Teacher Training Institute in Omdurman. During school and college short holidays I visited other parts of Sudan, often by invitation of friends. During annual leave I explored neighbouring countries. The coloured pictures were taken with my camera.

I write with candour and affection, and also with awareness that the khawaja must still watch his step. I thank those who have helped in this production. Where there are errors, I am open to correction. I thank God for the friendships and adventure of those teaching years and my many return visits. The book comes with warm wishes to the families of both Sudans, as they face today's challenges and opportunities. If it encourages young khawajas in their desire to relate helpfully to the Arab and African world, so much the better.

Peter Everington
Acton, London
July 2016

HISTORICAL NOTE

In 1958 Sudan was the largest country in Africa and the ninth largest in the world. Two years earlier it had won independence from Egypt and Britain. Of its neighbours, Libya had a king and Ethiopia an emperor; Eritrea was part of Ethiopia; Kenya and Uganda were ruled by Britain, Congo by Belgium; today's Central African Republic and Chad were part of France; Egypt was joined to Syria in the United Arab Republic. Elsewhere in the continent, South-West Africa (now Namibia) was ruled by South Africa, where the apartheid government had another 36 years to run. Morocco, Tunisia and Ghana had also won independence, but all other African countries were under European colonial rule. The passion for African and Arab nationalism ran deep in Sudan. The population was 11 million. The vast Gezira Scheme, irrigated from the Blue Nile, produced quality cotton which sold well on world markets, and the Sudanese Pound was at parity with the Pound Sterling.

FIRST VIEW OF AFRICA

The first view of a new continent is probably one that most people remember for life. But what if that view is of the world's mightiest river?

The plane which brought me from London landed at sunset at Wadi Seidna aerodrome. From the airport bus we saw very little in the dark except some white-robed people in the lamp-lit streets of Omdurman. The few of us who were newcomers to Sudan were dropped at the Grand Hotel, where we went thankfully to bed as soon as possible. It had been a two-day journey with a night stop in Malta.

As I came out of the front door before breakfast, I looked across an avenue and behold! The Blue Nile, in spate from the summer rains in Ethiopia. I had never seen a river of such width and force. On the far bank were cultivators at work in the fields of Tuti Island. There was a ferry in sight, which I later took to watch men at work in the brick kilns on the shore of the island.

Nile Avenue was flanked on one side by banyan and on the other by mahogany trees. Half a mile to the west at the Mogren, the Blue Nile collides with the White Nile, which arrives at a much more sedate pace from Uganda. I watched pelicans fishing in the confluence. Trams rumbled over the nearby White Nile Bridge amid cars, bicycles, donkey riders and pedestrians. On the horizon across the waters gleamed the silver dome of the Mahdi's Tomb in Omdurman. Northwards the combined Nile began its majestic flow to Egypt and the Mediterranean.

It is impossible to portray in words and pictures the awesome grandeur and beauty of Sudan. Some years later on one of several visits to South Sudan, I sat by the White Nile in Juba and noted:

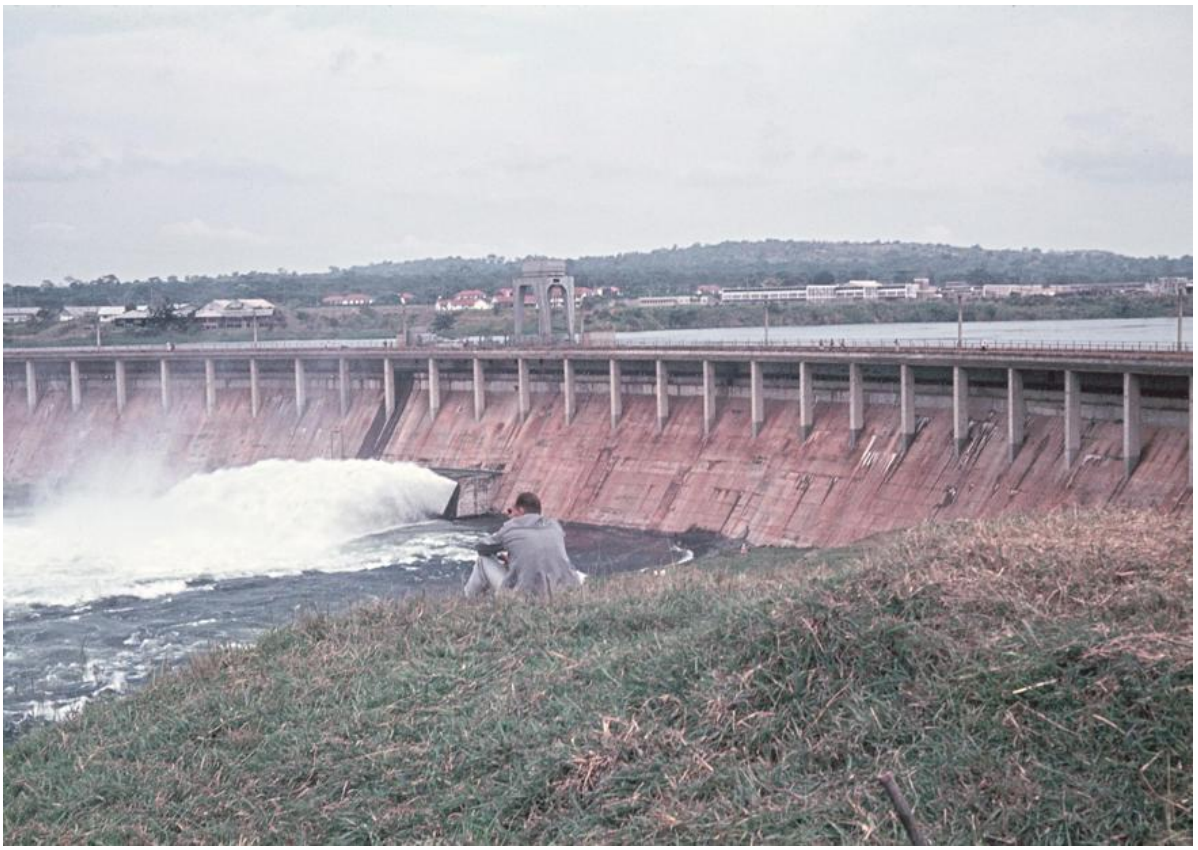
"Two morning quiet hours by the Nile, either side of sunrise. The mighty river, nearly a mile wide, on its northward flow. A flight of black geese skim the dark water, honking. The rising sun peeps round a mango grove on the other bank. A kingfisher rises from the bank this side, and hovers silhouetted against the sun before diving for its prey. Later in the morning when I return to the same spot, a young crocodile is sunning itself on a rock."

As so often, these wonders are best expressed in the Psalms of David:

"Those who live at earth's furthest bounds are awed by your signs; you make the gateways of the morning and evening shout for joy. You visit the earth and water it. You greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; you provide the people with grain, for so you have prepared it" (Psalm 65).

"O Lord, what a variety you have made! And in wisdom you have made them all! The earth is full of your riches" (Psalm 104).

Meeting of the White and Blue Niles at Khartoum



White Nile at Owen Falls Dam, Uganda

White Nile at Khartoum

Blue Nile Bridge, road and railway

The Republican Palace

Alongside the Blue Nile

Khartoum Mosque and bus station

University of Khartoum

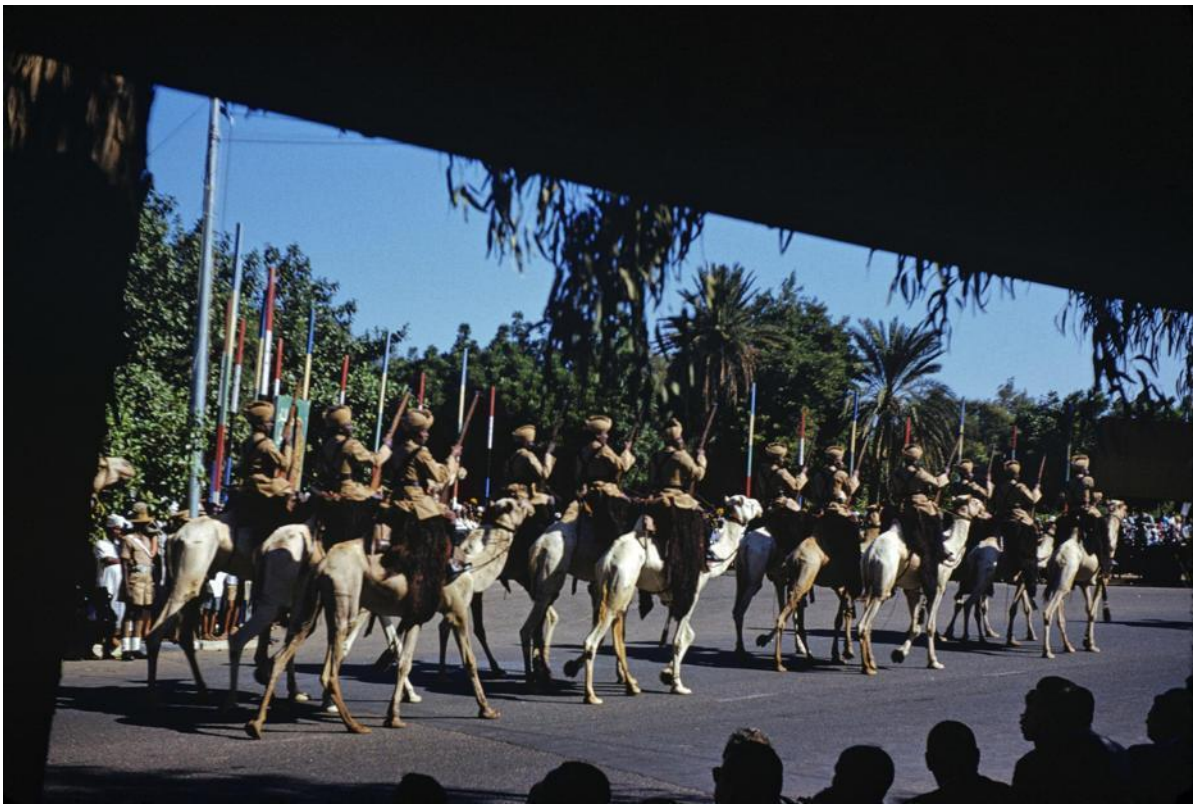
Stack Laboratory

Main Post Office and Ministry of Communications

Tuti Island brick-making

The kiln

The transport



Independence Day parade. Camel Corps

PORT SUDAN

The Sudanese Embassy in London did not know which secondary school I would work in. Given the size of Sudan, that is like arriving from Africa in Europe not knowing whether you are going to work in Rome or Edinburgh.

The first morning in Khartoum I reported to the Ministry of Education and learned that my posting was to Port Sudan on the Red Sea coast. The Inspector of English Sean Morgan set me to work for two weeks in his office sorting second-hand books for schools. In my spare time I explored Khartoum and met a few Sudanese to whom I had been given introductions. On the morning of September 16 I went to Khartoum railway station, ready for the 27-hour journey, but with no idea where I would live in Port Sudan, or how I would get on as a teacher in this strange land. I was 23, with everything to learn.

At that time the education system was four years each for Elementary, Intermediate and Secondary. English was taught from early in Intermediate. It was the language of instruction at Secondary for all subjects except Arabic and Islamic Religion. There were about 8 Government secondary schools for boys in the whole country, with a total of under 5,000 pupils, and one Government secondary for girls.

Port Sudan in 1958 was the only Government secondary school for boys in an area larger than France. Its catchment area was between the Ethiopian border and the Egyptian border, a population of perhaps two and a half million, comprising Kassala Province and most of Northern Province. It had several hundred boys, all Muslim, the majority boarders. The school was housed in old barracks built of coral stone, with some modern teaching and dormitory buildings. The Red Sea was a few hundred yards away.

The Headmaster was Mirghani Hamza and the Deputy Head Tayeb Shibeika. There were some senior Sudanese teachers like Derar Salih Derar (History), Kazim (Geography), Omer Siddik (English), and Geritly (Art), and a greater number of Sudanese recent graduates. There were several British teachers, Macbeth (Science), Hall (History), and Vanstone, Gorey and I (English). I wondered how the British teachers were regarded, so soon after Independence. In fact headmasters seemed to take pride in having a few tame imperialists under their rule, rather like Emperor Haile Selassie with his pet lions.

I had been a pupil at boarding schools in Britain. Port Sudan Secondary felt very British in its system of “houses” that competed against each other in sports. At that stage of Independence the Sudanese wanted to prove they could run a British system more efficiently than the British. It would be some years before major innovations came, like changing the secondary school syllabus into Arabic.

Pupils who reached secondary level knew they were a favoured minority in the country. Urged on by strict fathers, they expected to work hard and reap the rewards of an elite. There were some truly brilliant ones, for instance Zakariah Beshir, who later became a professor of philosophy. A few pupils need no teaching: for them you just open the door of a palace you will never enter yourself. Other names I remember are Jaafar Hassan Salih (a future diplomat), Abdel Hai Siam, Shakir Abdel Majid (who became a doctor), Hassan El Imam El Hijaya from Gedaref, Dahab Ahmed Kheiri from Wadi Halfa, and Abdel Ghaffar Yousif from Sinja.

There were two (to me) distinctive features to Sudanese students. One was poetry, a living part of their heritage. There would always be at least one boy in the class capable of writing a poem of quality for a school concert. This was received with the rapturous applause that might greet a pop singer or a comedian in Britain.

The other feature was political activism. Strikes in Sudanese schools, as well as in the strong trades union movement, had been a major part of the Sudanese campaign against British rule. Now they continued strongly as a means of influencing post-independent governments. The first time I saw police with batons charging groups of demonstrating students in the school grounds, I felt sick at heart. I never fully got used to it.

For all their poetic and political qualities, Sudanese schoolboys were ordinary rogues as in any country. I was alarmed one day to receive a note from the Deputy Headmaster "The following six boys from your class were out of bounds in the town yesterday. Please beat. And thanks, Tayeb Shibeika." How would these young patriots take to being caned by an Englishman? I followed procedure, asking the murasla (office messenger) to bring a cane, then practising on a chair cushion in the English department office. The six boys came in one by one for 'six of the best' on the backside. The other teachers kept their heads down in their books as if nothing else was going on. The boys took their punishment stoically as what they deserved, rather than an act of neo-imperialism.

The winter climate in Port Sudan was very pleasant with a cool breeze. Summer was different. One June day the Science block of the school registered a shade temperature of 49c. With the high humidity, evening homework periods were formidable for the boys. Air-conditioning was unheard of. There might be a ceiling fan in the classroom if you were lucky. It was still the age of pens and ink pots. At worst, sweat would run down the pupils' arms, smudging their exercise books. When it got to this stage, the headmaster would declare the end of term. Because of its coastal climate, Port Sudan differed from other parts of Sudan in taking its schools summer break from early July to mid-September.

The District Commissioner (DC) of Port Sudan was Ahmed Mohammed El Amin Abu Shama, from Sororab near Omdurman. The Assistant DC was Clement Mboro, a Christian from Wau in the South. I came to know both of them well and we kept in touch through the following years. Before Independence British officials had to pass a test in spoken Arabic before the end of their first year to obtain promotion. By the time I came, this was no longer compulsory, but I decided to take it after four months as a challenge. My one-year university course had been purely in classical written Arabic, and I could not converse in the Sudanese dialect.

I asked the young Sudanese teachers if I could join their table for lunch each day in the school dining-hall. They chatted away in rapid Arabic with no concession to the khawaja. It is especially frustrating when someone tells a joke in Arabic and everybody laughs except you. A great stimulus to learning. Ahmed Abu Shama examined me and I passed, but there were a few gaps. He asked me the word for pharmacy and I guessed wrongly 'farmasia'. The correct answer was 'ajzakhana', one of many Turkish words which had remained in Sudanese Arabic from Ottoman times.

How good those young teachers were to me – Abdel Salaam Mahmoud (Biology), Osman Abdel Wahab (Biology), Obeid Kheiri (English), Bustan (Maths), Mohammed

Osman Abbas Subhi (History) among many others. I did not adequately return their hospitality, though later at home in Britain I did my best for Sudanese visitors. On my first school holiday over Christmas and New Year 1958-9, Osman invited me to stay at his home in Omdurman. His father produced sesame oil. At his factory he had two giant wooden mortars. A rotating wooden pestle crushed the sesame seed. The mechanism was driven by a blindfolded camel which walked in a continuous circle, watched by a young worker.

From Omdurman, Osman and I both travelled by train to Abdel Salaam's home in Kamlin on the Blue Nile. We stayed in the home of Abdel Salaam's older brother who was headmaster of the Kamlin Primary School. One day we visited someone on the opposite bank and were ferried across in a large rowing boat with two men at the oars. The passengers included several sheep.

Like any port, Port Sudan had a cosmopolitan feel to it. There were a number of British in businesses like Cable and Wireless, Gellatly Hankey and Mitchell Cotts. A priest from Northern Ireland looked after the Anglican Church and the Missions to Seamen. Of course there was a British club with a bar and a swimming pool. At that time, it seemed to me, any small British community around the world could always provide an organist and a wicket keeper. We played cricket matches on a mat laid on a surface of coral gravel. Our opponents were the Indian traders and sometimes the crew of a visiting ship. I remember a tall Australian hitting a straight six off my slow bowling.

Overland pilgrims to Mecca still came through the port in great numbers, taking ship to Jeddah. Below the room where I lodged was the Nigerian Pilgrims Office. I had long talks with the courtly Hausa man from North Nigeria who was in charge. He and his staff catered for thousands from places like Kaduna and Kano who crossed the Sahara by lorry to the railhead in Sudan. The office saw them through quarantine on to ships to Jeddah. Some pilgrims took jobs like cotton-picking in Sudan to help finance their journey. Some married local girls and never left. There is a very large community of people known as Fellata – Nigerians and other West Africans – who have settled in Sudan. At that time Muslim scholars from Sudan such as Sheikh Awad would go to teach in the theological colleges of Kano, Kaduna and Sokoto. Later in Khartoum I got to know a Sudanese lawyer, Dafallah Haj Yousif, who had run a business in North Nigeria.

Sometimes there were ceremonial occasions in Port Sudan. In 1959 President Tito of Yugoslavia and his wife arrived on a state visit by ship. He was building up the Non-Aligned Movement with Indian Prime Minister Nehru and Egypt's President Nasser. The Sudan Government laid on an official welcome at the port. I sat just a few rows behind Tito and his wife. Another time a British warship put into port "showing the flag" and everyone was invited to go on board. The next day an ardent communist called Tijani in my third-year class asked what I thought of it. As I hesitated, he said, "If it belonged to my country, I should be very proud."

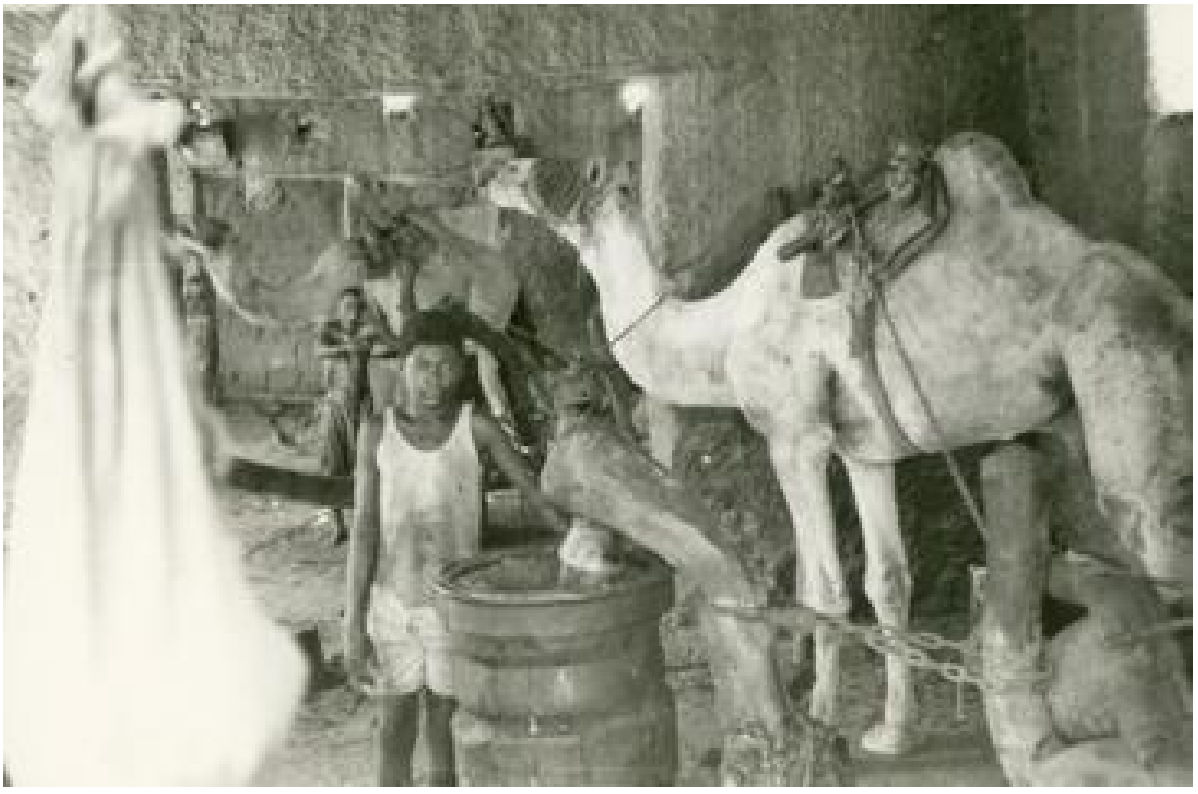
Port Sudan was a stronghold of the Khatmia sect of Islam, led by the Mirghani family, who looked to Egypt for support. They were rivals of the Ansar, led by the Mahdi family, who looked more to Britain. A few weeks after my arrival in Sudan, Geritly the Art master, offered me and another Sudanese teacher a lift in his open-roof Morris Minor. Somehow we got stuck in the middle of a Khatmia procession, and made slow progress past the crowds cheering on both sides of the road. Halfway through, we were overtaken on the inside by three warriors abreast on galloping camels. All of it somewhat different from the

traffic in my home town in suburban London. The Sudanese have a keen sense of humour and we could have a good laugh about it.

Port Sudan in 1958

Port Sudan Secondary

Port Sudan teachers in Suakin. Abdel Salaam Mahmoud second from left; Osman Abdel Wahab far right



Sesame mill in Omdurman belonging to Osman Abdel Wahab's father

SUAKIN and ERKOWIT

Suakin was the old Ottoman port on the Red Sea. During Mahdist rule 1885-98 it still had a garrison of British and Egyptian troops. The Mahdist Emir of the East was Osman Digna. His soldiers were the Hadendowa people of the Red Sea Hills. They kept up a guerrilla fight, and twice defeated the occupying power in open battle. With their great mane of uncut hair and their flashing swords, they won the respect of their enemies. A British poet of that time, Kipling, wrote a poem celebrating their courage.

There is a legend about Osman Digna. He travelled from the Red Sea coast and swore allegiance to the Mahdi, who was camped in West Sudan. On leaving the Mahdi's stockade, instead of using the exit, he forced his way through the fence of thorn branches, tearing his clothes and flesh. When asked why, he declared, "The Mahdi has made me Emir of the East. I can go no direction but East."

After his capture by the British, he spent the rest of his life in house detention at Wadi Halfa near the Egyptian border. In 1964 when that Nubian region was to be flooded by the reservoir behind the Aswan High Dam, his body was reburied with honour at Erkowit among his people in the Red Sea Hills. Two years later I went to Erkowit and called on the Omda, who took me on a tour of the area, including Osman Digna's new grave. Trying to elicit more information, I said, "A great man, wasn't he". The Omda replied sharply, "Kaif ma kebir, dufan marratain - What else but great? He was buried twice", and said no more.

As a port, Suakin could never take modern ocean-going ships. In the early 1900s the British built Port Sudan. The Hadendowa became the dockworkers, a familiar sight in the streets of Port Sudan when I was there in 1958. A familiar scent too as they shaped their bushy hair with mutton fat.

Port Sudan secondary pupils liked to go on a weekend outing as a class. Suakin was a favourite destination. First they would persuade one or two teachers to come with them. Enough money was contributed to hire a lorry with driver for five pounds, and buy a live sheep for five pounds. They would buy other basic supplies and borrow cooking pans from the school kitchen.

I went on one of the journeys, leaving the school on Thursday afternoon along the 40-mile [or 62-kilometre] dirt road. In 1958 there were no paved roads outside the main towns in the whole country. Teachers were first class passengers sitting beside the driver. Boys, live sheep, and equipment were behind on the open lorry.

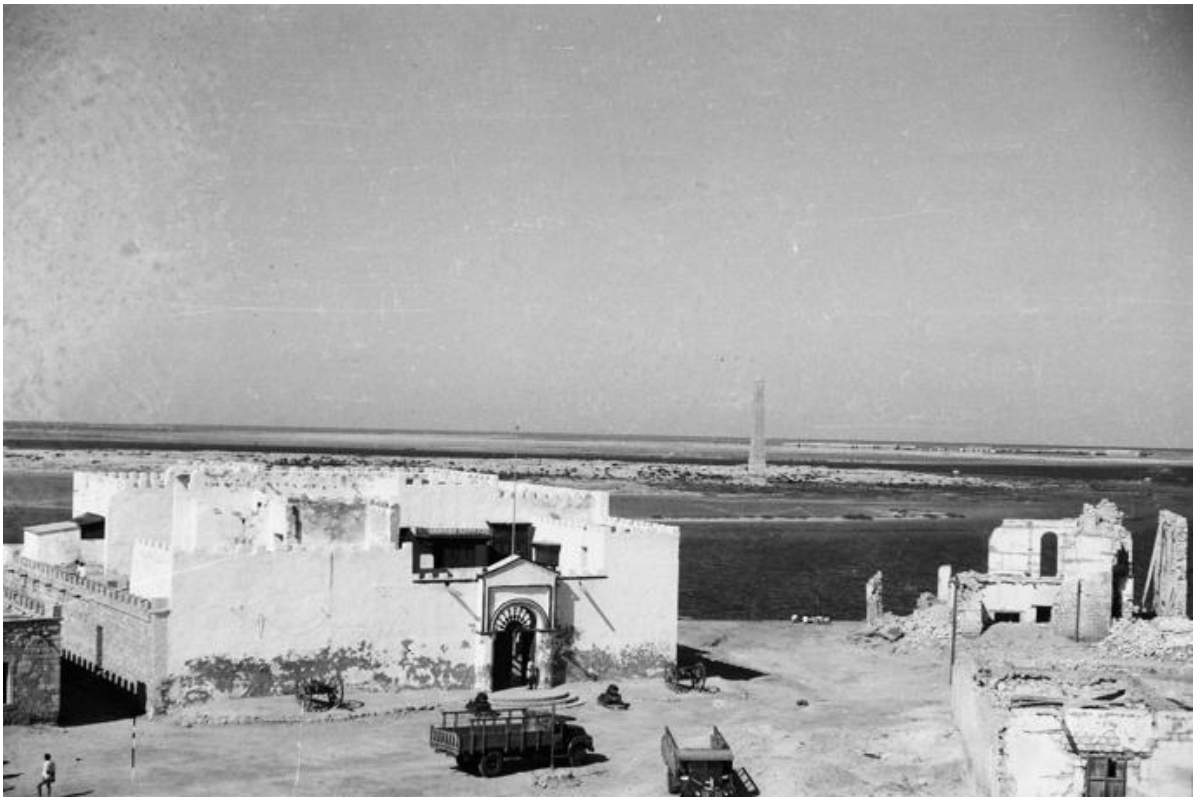
Suakin by that time was a crumbling town with no electricity, but a few people still lived there. In the main square the Ottoman buildings with their white-washed walls retained dignity and charm. At the water's edge was the old Customs building, and alongside it the Governor's Residence looking out the bay. On the other side of the square was a mosque, with an elderly imam who still mounted the minaret five times a day to sound the call to prayer without a microphone.

The sheep was tethered on the quay, and we all settled into the large room of the upper floor of the Governor's house. Paraffin lamps were lit, and a light supper prepared by the boys, with tea brewed on an open fire outside.

Afterwards evening prayers were performed by some, followed by an impromptu concert. Jokes were told, poetry recited, a boy played a lute, and most of them sang. At one point it was announced that Mr Everington would sing a song. I gave a confident rendering of "Maybe it's because I'm a Londoner that I love London town". It was received with polite applause. Then we settled down to a peaceful night, with moon and stars reflected on the bay, and the sound of waves lapping against the quay below.

In the morning the sheep was strung up by its hind legs on a metal bar overhanging the water, and one of the boys cut its throat. He and a local man skinned and cut it into portions. Liver, kidneys, and other parts were fried for breakfast and the rest reserved for lunch. During the morning we roamed the town, played football, and chatted over endless cups of sweet black tea and coffee. Some responded to the muezzin's call to Friday prayers and then, using fingers we devoured an enormous lunch of mutton and rice. Next morning the Port Sudan school week started at 7.30 as usual.

All aboard, ready to leave



Suakin view from minaret

Governor's residence

Ottoman customs building

Suakin bay

School trip to Suakin

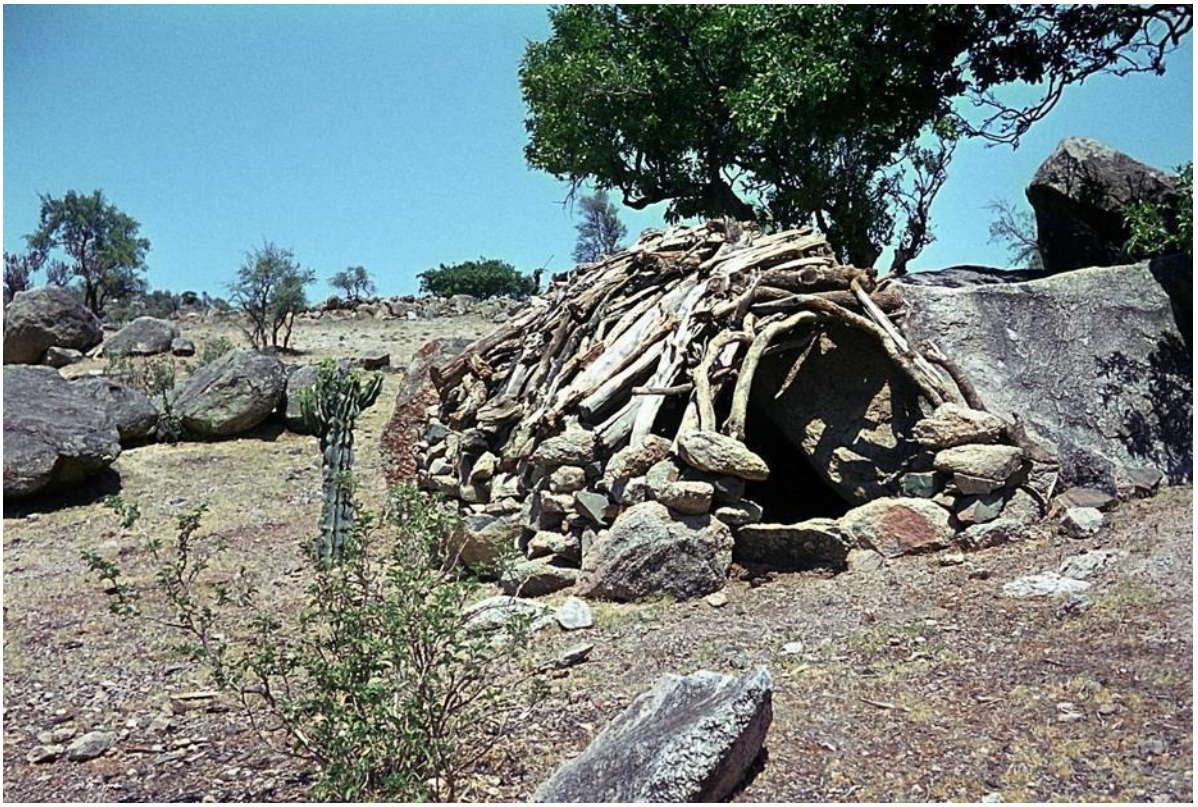
Skinning the sheep

Red Sea Hills at Erkowit

Erkowit terrain

Omda (community leader) and family

Hadendowa



Dwelling made of Euphorbia branches

Chameleon

Brewing Jabana (spiced coffee)

Jabana pot

A COTTON CLASSIFIER

In the small hotel where I stayed first in Port Sudan there were four trainee cotton classifiers from the Sudan Gezira Board (SGB). The Board at that time had a million acres under irrigation in the Gezira, the great triangle of land between the two Niles, fed from the Sennar Dam on the Blue Nile. Classifiers determined the grade of the cotton in the ginning factories. They were also needed at the port, as part of the negotiation with foreign buyers.

These four Arab nationalists looked with curiosity on the young Englishman who had arrived in their midst. Recognising my ignorance about life in Sudan, they showed me where to get ice, the makings of tea, and a score of other essentials. While their courtesy and care were outstanding, there seemed little common ground between us.

Meanwhile at the school, after a successful start, things were going badly for me. It did not take long for my third-year English Language class to realise I was an inexperienced teacher. Arabic grammar is codified in a 1000-line poem, and secondary students worked through 250 lines of it each year. So in English classes the cry went up, "Teach us the rules of English grammar". We English teachers tend to emphasise "usage", but there are indeed certain rules and I was ignorant of a few of them. A typical exchange in the class went like this.

Mohammed: "Sir, is there a rule which says all noun clauses begin with 'that'?"
Teacher: "The important thing is usage not rules, but what you say is, er, I think, right."
Ahmed: "Please explain that again"
Teacher does so again, even less convincingly.
Abdullah: "What about this sentence?" Reads a sentence that disproves the rule agreed.
Teacher perspires and prays for the bell to end this round.

Discipline broke down in this class, and teachers next door complained of the noise. I handed out punishment work, which was not done. I reported boys to the headmaster, who took no action. I lost my temper, and of course in a newly independent African country there is nothing quite so funny as an angry Englishman without power. Finally I remembered there was an escape clause in my contract, allowing me to opt out within three months. I was clearly a failure and should go back to England.

In my student days I had developed the practice of an hour of quiet in the early morning, praying for God's guidance for the day. I was trying to do it in Port Sudan, but now it didn't seem to work. In desperation one morning I wrote, "Absolute honesty. You are the cause of the indiscipline because you have pretended to know when you don't. A new teacher need not know everything, but must admit the limits of his knowledge. Say sorry to the class. Promise them first, 'I will prepare better', and second, 'If I don't know the answer to a question I will say so, and ask a more experienced colleague.'"

I felt if I did this I would lose all authority. In fact the class were amazed at my apology, and no doubt disappointed that I had spoiled their fun. There were no more discipline problems. And I became expert on the noun clause.

But the story went round the school and the town that an Englishman had said sorry. “What made you do it?” asked my classifier friends. This led to deep talks with one of them, Omer El Jak. A few weeks later he and one other were sent on a training course at the Liverpool Cotton Exchange. It was their first visit to Britain, and I put them in touch with friends there who gave them the same care they had given me.

Two years later Omer El Jak was a classifier at the Marenjan ginning factory. By then he was married to Amna who had produced their first child Jamal, named after President Nasser of Egypt. Omer recognised ‘absolute honesty’ as a Muslim quality and was seeking God’s guidance on how to apply it in his work. From Marenjan he wrote to me about the results. That year the crop was plentiful, but the rains had come early. There was a danger that the newly picked cotton would be damaged as it sat outside the factory waiting to be ginned. The practice of the classifiers was to start at six in the morning, work till about two and then, like the rest of the work force, rest through the great heat of the afternoon. As Omer meditated on the crisis, he felt he should stir himself to raise a volunteer force who would work overtime until sunset. The managing director accepted, and Omer later wrote to me, “Because of Moral Re-Armament, thousands of tons of cotton have been saved that would otherwise have been ruined.”

Moral Re-Armament was the idea Omer and I were trying to apply. The name doesn’t matter. In fact it is now known as Initiatives of Change. The important thing is to find how people of good will, from different traditions, can work together for public benefit.

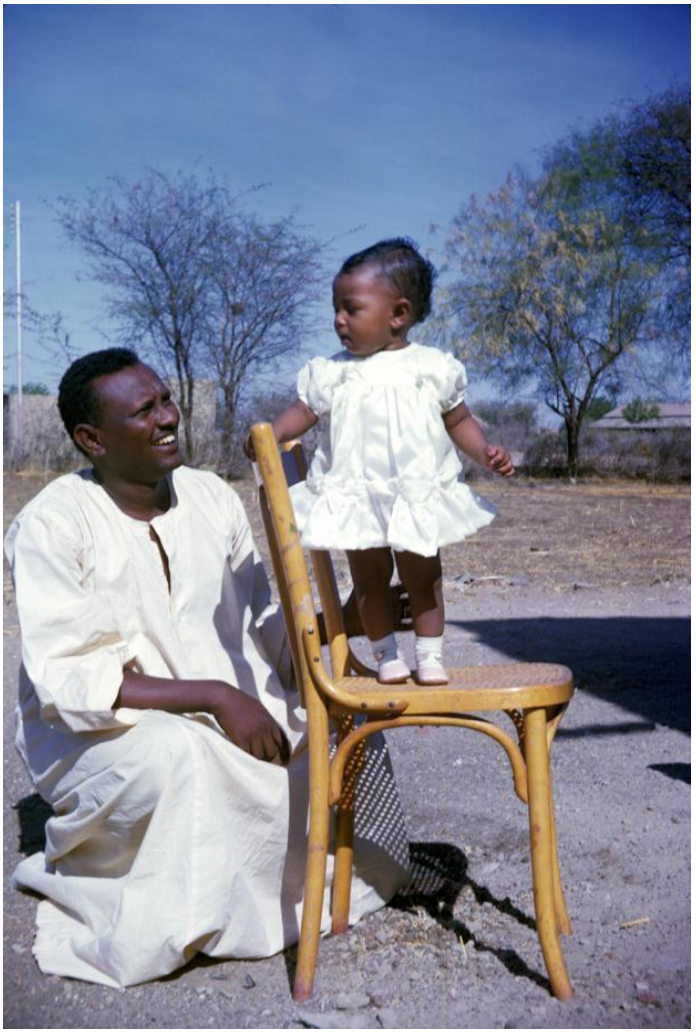
Some years later Omer El Jak became the first Sudanese to be appointed Chief Classifier of the Sudan Gezira Board. I visited him and Amna at their new home in Barakat and we went one day to Fedassi, the delightful village on the Blue Nile he originally came from.

For many years after I finished teaching in Sudan, Omer and I did not meet, but we kept in touch by letter, and the reunions when they came were all the more joyful. On one visit his daughter Manal and her brother took me to supper in the Gezira Club in Wad Medani. In the early 1980s Omer helped me set up a student exchange programme between Britain and Gezira University in Wad Medani. Not long afterwards his Fedassi cousin Dr Mubarak Mohammed Al Majzoub became President of the University. I came to know him and his younger brother Dr Mohi El Din.

Omer was a joker and kept me laughing through difficult times. He had his down moments too when I could encourage him. In 2002 he was dying of cancer, and my wife Jean and I made our final visit to the family home in Shari El Daraja in Wad Medani. Over an enormous Friday breakfast cooked by Amna I could say thank-you and good-bye to a remarkable friend.

Blue Nile at Tisisat Falls, Ethiopia

Blue Nile leaving Laka Tana, Ethiopia



Cotton classifier Omer El Jak at home in Hasaheisa

Gezira from plane

Gezira canal

Blue Nile at Hasaheisa

SALARY

The morning quiet time also meant having a notebook to write any helpful thoughts that came. Of course it can be dangerous to claim that you have been guided by God to do something. Such thoughts need testing against moral standards, for instance absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness and love. Even so, it is easy to be deluded by self-seeking. 'The practice of the presence of God', as a Christian writer called it, seems to be a lifelong search. I like the verse in the Quran which commands: "Do not say about anything 'I shall do that tomorrow' without saying 'if God wills'. Remember your Lord if you have forgotten him, and say 'Perhaps my Lord will direct me to something closer to his guidance'."

1959 was a year of economic crisis for Sudan with a large drop in cotton revenue. The shops were empty of goods and there was an air of depression in the country.

By chance at that time I read about U Nu, who had just been replaced as Prime Minister of Burma. As he was moving out of the official residence, he refused to take a number of suits and robes. He said these had been paid for by the state for his duties, and they did not belong to him.

Inspired by this story, I kept getting the thought that I should be ready to take a cut in salary for one year. Was this God's guidance? I still don't fully know. I was a bachelor and my living expenses in Sudan were light. When on leave in UK I would live with my parents. The Sudan Government would pay my air fare home. As a civil servant, within Sudan I travelled free by train when on duty, and otherwise was entitled to a discount. My annual salary of £1,050 felt like a fortune after my student years.

I wrote a confidential letter to the Minister of Education Ziada Arbab, saying I did not need all my salary that year, and offering to take a 25% cut, in the light of the national economic crisis. I showed the letter to my headmaster Mirghani Hamza, a kindly man, who promised to pass it on confidentially. This is when I discovered there is no such thing as a confidential letter in Africa. The following week several Arabic papers published a story that a British teacher in Port Sudan had made this offer. I was quickly found out.

My Sudanese colleagues were profuse in their thanks. They were aware of my expatriate salary and had to manage on much less. Some of the older British teachers in the country were annoyed. Most had families and were paying a mortgage on a home in UK. They needed every piastre of their salary, and felt I had undercut them. One Arabic newspaper dishonestly changed the wording of my letter from "I do not need all my salary" to "I do not deserve .." After two months I had a reply from the Minister, thanking me but saying for administrative reasons he could not accept the offer.

Looking back, it was one of those ideas that don't work out as you expect. Yet it was a step towards identifying with the country and its needs. Later in Khartoum I found a very relevant use for the LS 262 of salary I had offered not to take. More about this later.

A NUBIAN FAMILY IN KASSALA

In March every year secondary school teachers were sent to invigilate intermediate school final exams. We Port Sudan Secondary teachers were sent all over Kassala Province. I went to the intermediate school at Aroma. Aroma was the centre of a cotton scheme fed by the seasonal flooding of the River Gash, which came from the part of Ethiopia that is now Eritrea. I stayed with the District Commissioner Karrar Ahmed Karrar and we had long talks. He was reading the newly published 'The Making of the Modern Sudan' by Henderson, a former Governor of Kordofan. It was about Douglas Newbold, Civil Secretary of Sudan in the difficult years of World War Two. One truth Karrar took from the book was that an administrator should avoid joining any 'camp' in his area, whether ethnic, commercial or political.

The task of invigilation was light. In conversation with pupils after the exams, I remember one admitting that his father was reluctant for him to go away to secondary school, because the emphasis on religion might not be strong enough.

After Aroma I took up an invitation to stay with the Governor of Kassala Province, Daoud Abdel Latif, in Kassala town, about an hour's drive away. Daoud had attended the Moral Re-Armament (MRA) conference in Caux, Switzerland, and a British friend had given me an introduction to him.

There was a haboob (dust storm) that day, and it was an open truck, so I arrived at the Governor's residence absolutely filthy. Nevertheless there was a warm welcome from Daoud and his wife Fathiya and their young family. They were Nubians from Wadi Halfa near the Egyptian border. Their language Nubian is one of the scores of languages spoken in Sudan. I have never got beyond 'mascagna' the greeting to one person, and 'mascagro' the greeting to a group.

I learned a lot from Daoud then and over the following years. One of his first observations to me was about the Hadendowa people of the East. "Most Sudanese like to live close to each other. But the Hadendowa are like the British. They like to live as far away from each other as possible."

As a student activist at Gordon College (forerunner of the present University of Khartoum) in the 1930's, he had taken part in protests and strikes. Though he was still opposed to several British policies and attitudes, there were elements of British culture and administration that he admired. He too was reading Henderson's book with appreciation.

From Karrar, Daoud, and other Sudanese of that generation I learned that, alongside the frequent arrogance and rigidity of an imperial policy, Britain had sent many people to Sudan with a competence, integrity and humanity which the Sudanese remembered with affection.

Daoud and his family were going out for much of one day, leaving me alone in the house. I was nervous about how it would look if a young Englishman answered the doorbell of the Governor's residence. He said with a laugh, "There are many older Sudanese who confidently expect the British to return to rule, and this will just confirm their belief!"

Daoud needed to go to Port Sudan on duty, and so Sudan Railways hitched the Governor's carriage to a goods train going there. The family were coming too, and he invited me to join them all. It was a single-line track, with passing lines at stations. We waited six hours at one station to give priority to a trainload of camels coming the other way. Fathiya did much of the cooking, and I made scrambled eggs for the family one supper. At Hayya Junction we found that President Ibrahim Abboud had halted on his rail journey from Port Sudan to Khartoum. Daoud went and had a long talk with him in the President's rail carriage.

About a year later Daoud was posted to Khartoum to take overall charge of the forced migration of the Sudanese Nubians from the Wadi Halfa region. The new Egyptian High Dam was going to be built at Aswan. The vast reservoir would be a lake of nearly 300 miles, flooding the ancient Nubian homeland both sides of the border. This looked like a catastrophe to the Nubians, with the approaching loss of their homes, villages, towns, land, date palms, cultivation, ancestral graves, and social structures. They would be separated for ever from their Nubian brothers and sisters in Egypt, because the Sudan Government planned to move them hundreds of miles to New Halfa near the Ethiopian border.

It was a highly sensitive task for Daoud to win acceptance from his people, school the authorities in the right attitudes, and monitor progress on the new settlement. A dam on the River Atbara was being built at Khashm El Girba, with canals downstream to irrigate great areas of desert land for sugar cane. A sugar factory was being constructed, as well as schools and hospitals. Villages were laid out along the banks of the river with the same names, and order of geography, as their originals in the Nile valley.

There was widespread anger among the Nubians, not least their large community in the capital. One of the major demonstrations in Khartoum was led by Daoud's wife Fathiya!

The family were already installed in a new home in Khartoum when I was posted to Khartoum Boys Secondary School in late 1960. I used to visit them on a Friday morning and was always welcomed into the heart of the family. Fathiya served delicious iced fruit drinks, orange, lime, grapefruit, guava and mango which she made fresh herself on the day. Her younger sister Awatif lived with the family while she studied at Unity High School for Girls, and helped in the home. The three eldest children were Amir, Osama and Motasim, and I played football and other games with them in the garden.

Daoud was a humorous and outspoken personality who would say what he really felt without fear, both in private and in public. The military Government called themselves 'athaura al mubaraka – the blessed revolution'. Daoud said to a group of people at the Cultural Club in Khartoum, "We Nubians don't understand Arabic very well. If thaur is the Arabic for a bull, thaura must be the feminine of that." He described the Non-Aligned Movement as "a process where you stand for nothing yourself and blackmail both sides." I enjoyed picking his brains about the many things I didn't understand in Sudan.

There were sorrows too. The greatest was when their first-born Amir went on holiday to relatives in the North and was killed in a shooting accident. I have memories of sitting with Daoud and Fathiya in silence as they grieved inconsolably. A year later Fathiya gave birth to another boy, who they named Amir. The children, now adult men and women with families, have done an amazing job building up the DAL company which their father founded.

In 1964 the whole family came to visit my bachelor flat at Christmas time. The first Amir is in the picture I took.

Daud Abdel Latif and Family 1964

DOCTOR AND MINISTER

I first met Dr Mohammed Ahmed Ali when he was the Senior Medical Officer for Port Sudan. He too was a warm-hearted, humorous personality, who later became Minister of Health. I used to visit him in his Khartoum home, meeting his wife and his children Taysir and Magda.

Like Daoud Abdel Latif, he lived with the tension between duty to the Government and duty to his Nubian people, many of whom resented their enforced migration. It was a sorrow to everyone when he died aged 54. The Sudan Daily published the following lines from me, amid many other tributes, on February 25 1962:

They say that power corrupts; but here was one
Whose ever open heart and open door
Admitted day and night each mother's son,
The sick, the young and old, the rich and poor.

He cared for people first, and nations too;
He gave his warmth and wit, his healing hand
To one and all. So all men saw and knew
A life poured out in service to his land.

God grant that we, who destiny decreed
Should heal or teach or build this great Sudan,
May do so free from pride and hate and greed,
Forgetting self as did this humble man.

Halfa, we thank you for a son you gave
Whose loyal spirit lives beyond the grave.

WADI HALFA

In Britain if you make a point of calling on people in top positions, you are regarded as ambitious and pushy. In Sudan it was considered good manners to call on the senior person in an area when you arrived as a stranger, whether in a province, town or village. For a European visitor this was especially important if you wanted to take photos. I learned to go to the man's office or home to pay my respects, let him know who I was, and ask his advice. Usually there was a warm welcome, and he was glad to talk.

During the New Year holiday of 1964 I went to Wadi Halfa to see what I could of the Nubia which would soon vanish. There were two trains a week to Wadi Halfa, and the journey took about 24 hours. As far as Atbara the train was pulled by one of the new diesel engines. From there it was a steam engine. The track runs alongside the Nile until Abu Hamad where the river takes a wide loop to the West through Dongola. From Abu Hamad the railway cuts across uninhabited desert, Batn-ul-Hajr, the Belly of Rocks, with a telegraph line alongside, until it rejoins the river at Wadi Halfa. The intervening stations are numbered One to Ten. They exist only for track maintenance and (in the age of steam engines) the storage of water.

When I arrived in Wadi Halfa, I called on the Commissioner, Hassan Dafallah. He was a very busy man. Plans for the evacuation of the region were at an advanced stage, and that month was the last when visitors were allowed to come. Teams of archaeologists from many countries were at work along that stretch of the Nile, excavating, charting and, where possible, removing ancient buildings that would otherwise be lost to human view for ever. Hassan Dafallah said I was welcome to go anywhere and take photos. He also pointed me to the grave of one of Sudan's national heroes, Osman Digna, and showed me a painting of him he had in his official residence. The grave was about to be moved to Erkowit in the Red Sea Hills where Osman Digna had commanded his guerrilla force.

One of the most striking archaeological finds in Nubia at that time was made by a team from Warsaw University led by Professor Michalowski in Faras West. They dug into a hill of sand and found a seventh century cathedral, part of the Christian culture that sprang from missions sent from Constantinople. The roof had fallen in, but on the walls were a series of frescoes showing the wings of pale-faced archangels protecting black Nubian bishops, and numerous other images with Greek inscriptions. The Polish archaeologists had a wonderful technique for peeling these frescoes off the walls. Underneath they would often find earlier layers of paintings. Some of these frescoes can be seen today in the National Museum in Khartoum, others in a museum in Warsaw.

To get to Faras West you had to cross the Nile by ferry, then get a ride North by lorry or taxi. On the way you passed through Argin, which struck me as a particularly beautiful village. So the day before my train back to Khartoum I visited Argin in the morning and called at the home of the Omda, Mohammed Ahmed, known as Idiya. He gave me a warm welcome and showed me round the village, introducing me to people like the baker, a man of standing. Then he took me home to lunch, and in the afternoon I could wander alone with my camera.

Nubian men were famous in Egypt and Sudan as waiters, cooks and house servants. When they came home on leave or retirement they liked to bring a few souvenir plates and

saucers with them. They set these in clay as ornaments above the outer door of their home. Nubia had hardly any rainfall, and the outer walls of the houses often had amusing paintings of animals and village life.

After tea with the Omda I was ready to go back to the hotel in Wadi Halfa across the river. But he told me he had invited an old friend to dinner. I must stay the night and he would provide a jalabiya (white cotton gown). By now I was getting nervous about the train I had to catch at 11 next morning. It was the first day of the Id ul Adha, and who knew if the ferries would be running? There were only two trains a week and I was due back at my teaching in three days time. The Omda assured me that all would be well, and it turned out to be a wonderful evening.

The guest had once been a valet of King Farouk, and the Omda had been a contractor in Egypt. These wise men knew a lot about the world and human nature. In the comfort of the Omda's mud-brick home, its ceiling beams of date palm lit by an oil lamp, I drank in their wisdom, occasionally asking a question or being asked for my own views. In the countryside, where time is plentiful, people often speak slower than townsfolk. These men had not been burdened by the abstracts of a university education and I could follow their Arabic without much difficulty. What came across was their genuineness rather than their words. The Omda's wife served us a meal and I met his children. One of the most wonderful evenings ever in Sudan.

Nevertheless I awoke with a worry about the ferry and the train. People came to greet the Omda for the Id and nobody was in a hurry. Eventually a lorry came and the Omda and I sat in the front seats next to the driver. It stopped frequently to pick up passengers, and greetings were exchanged at every stop. About a mile from the ferry we stopped for what seemed like an age outside a house for no apparent reason. To my shame, I burst out with protest to the Omda about what would happen if I missed the train.

The Omda listened graciously, then quietly said, "Patience, my brother. This is the house of the engine driver." In due course the engine driver joined us in the front seats of the lorry and all was joy. I invited the Omda to breakfast at the hotel, and he insisted on coming to the station to see me off. The engine driver allowed me to ride in the cab of his steam locomotive for a stretch of the journey across the Nubian desert. And I was back to my teaching on time.

There is a Muslim saying: 'Al ajala min ashaitan, wa atta'anni min arrahman. Haste is from the Devil; patient waiting is from the Merciful.' Sometimes the Sudanese would benefit from more haste. Usually the British would benefit from more patient waiting.

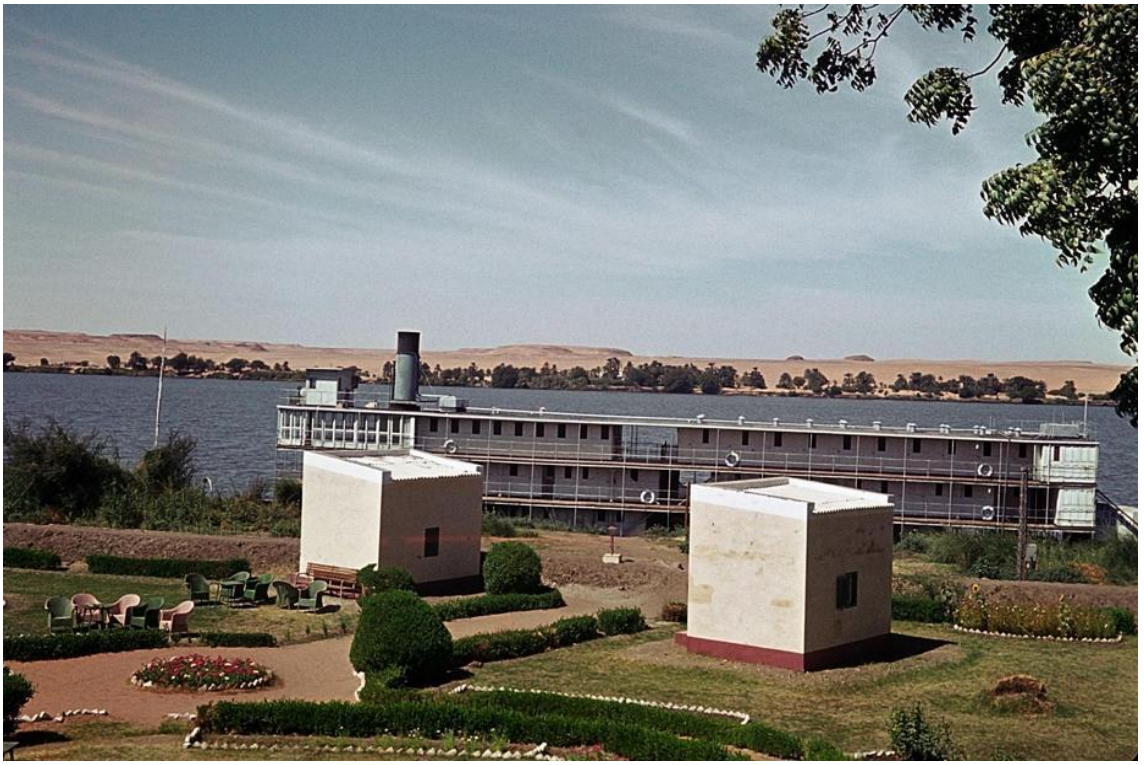
During those days based in Wadi Halfa I also visited the second cataract at Semna, the island of Meinarti, and the great Egyptian Temple of Abu Simbel, soon to be cut from the rocky hill it was part of and re-erected above the coming flood. All these awesome scenes had been enhanced by friendship with people of the living culture of Nubia.

Steam engine across the desert

Journey to Wadi Halfa. Diesel engine from Khartoum as far as Atbara

Desert and river

A Steamer arrives from Egypt



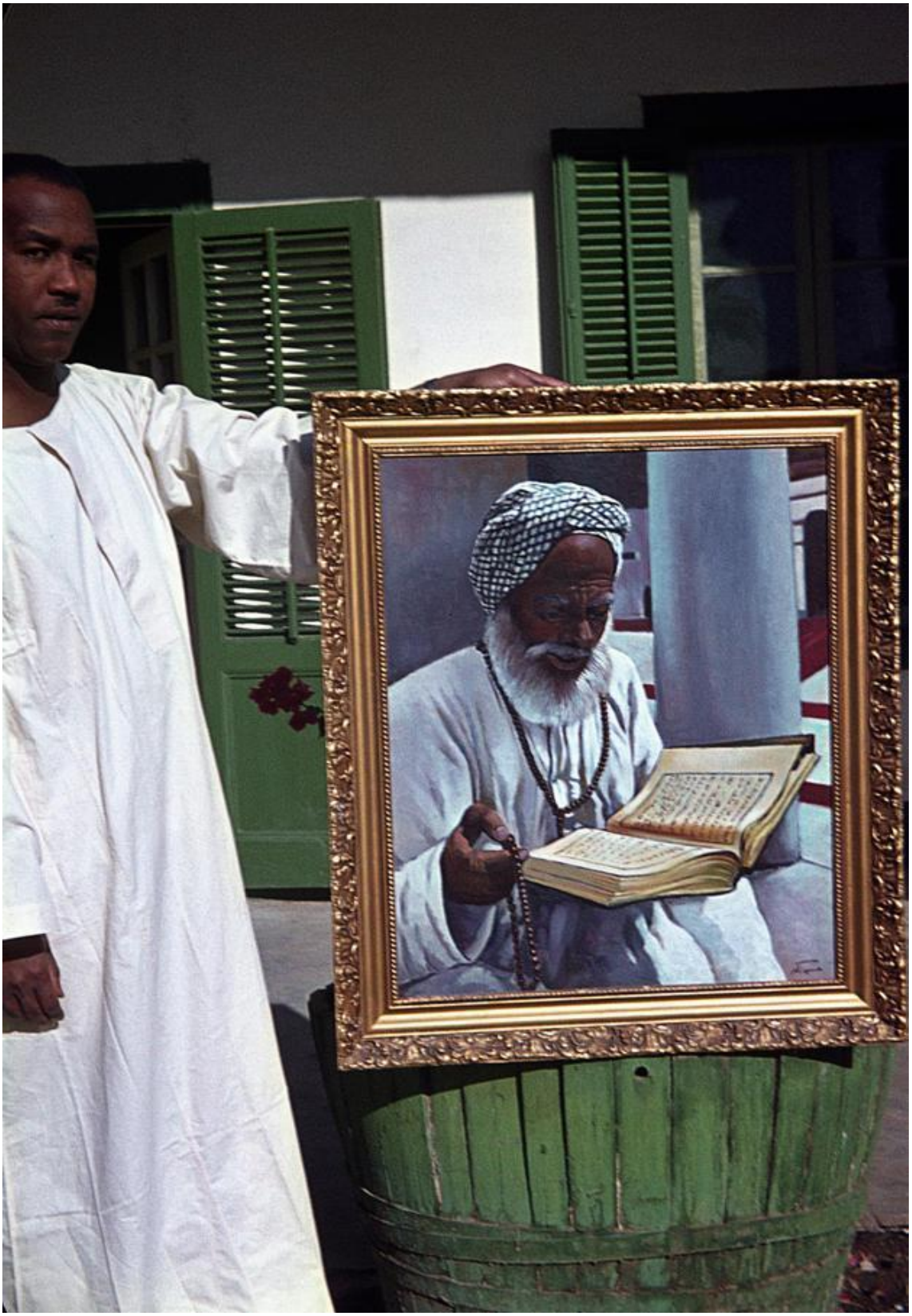
Wadi Halfa, garden of the Nile Hotel. The steamer, permanently moored, provided extra accommodation

Wadi Halfa Farmland

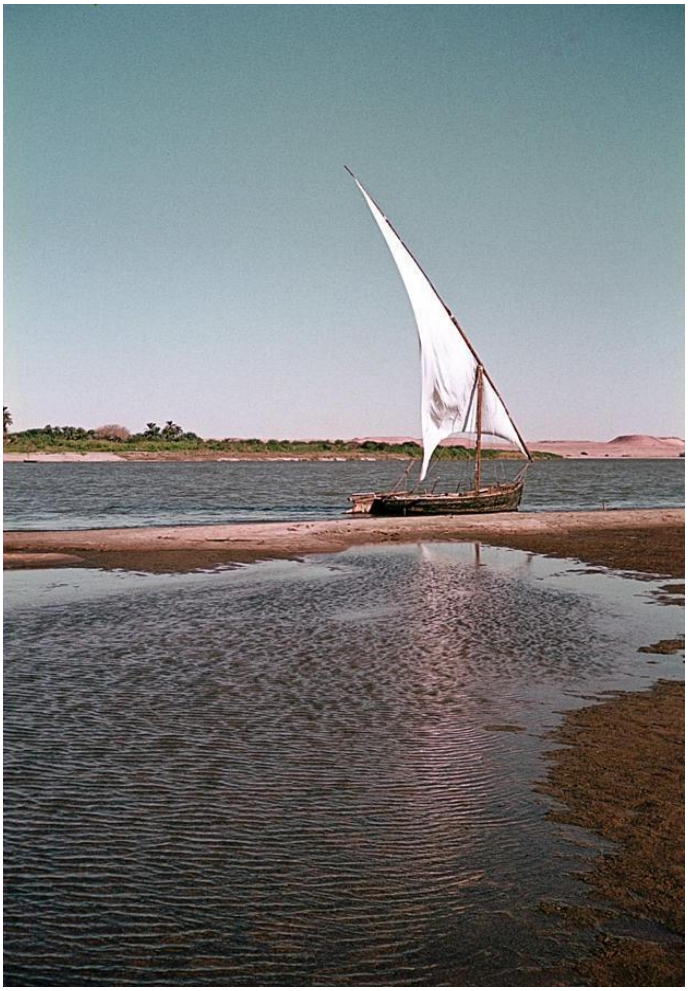
Commissioner's residence

Resthouse at Halfa

Grave of Osman Digna



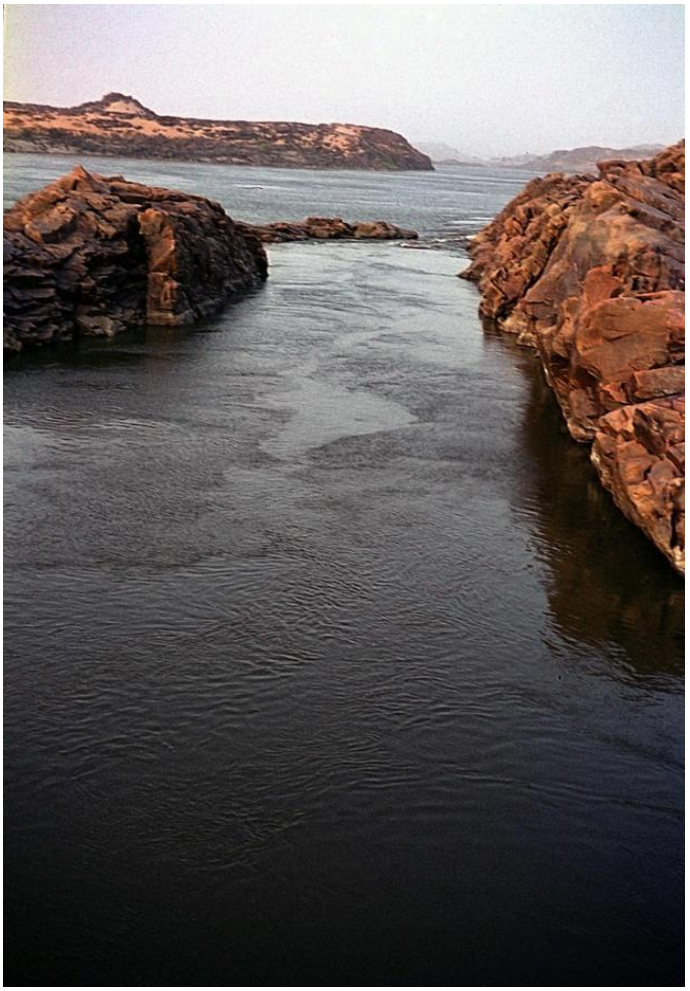
Commissioner Hassan Dafallah with Osman Digna portrait



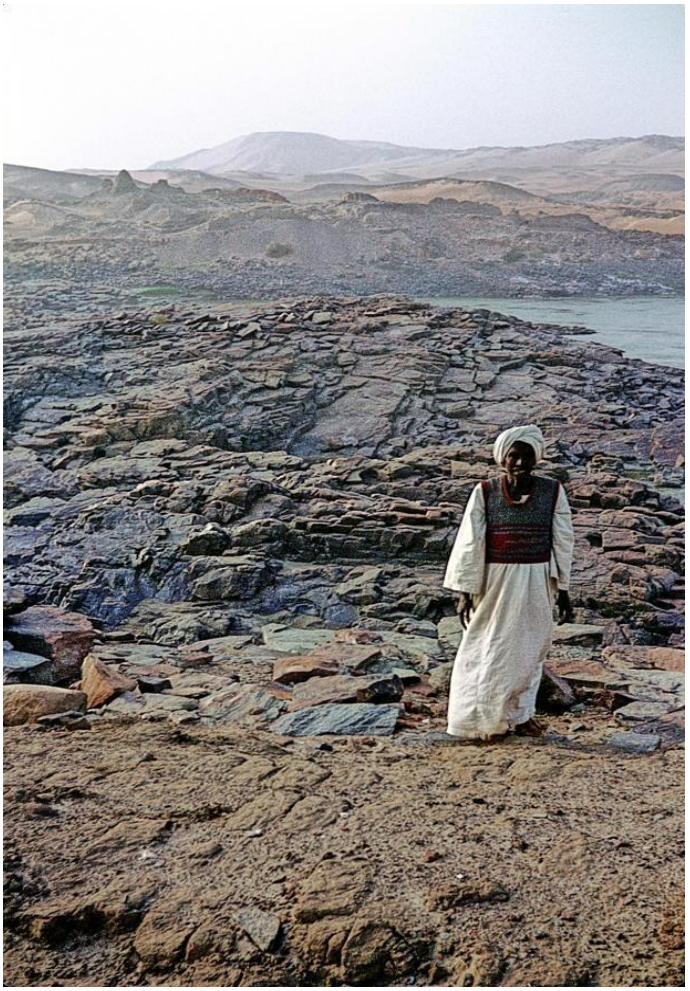
Meinarti Island

On the way to the Cataract, stuck in sand

Second Cataract



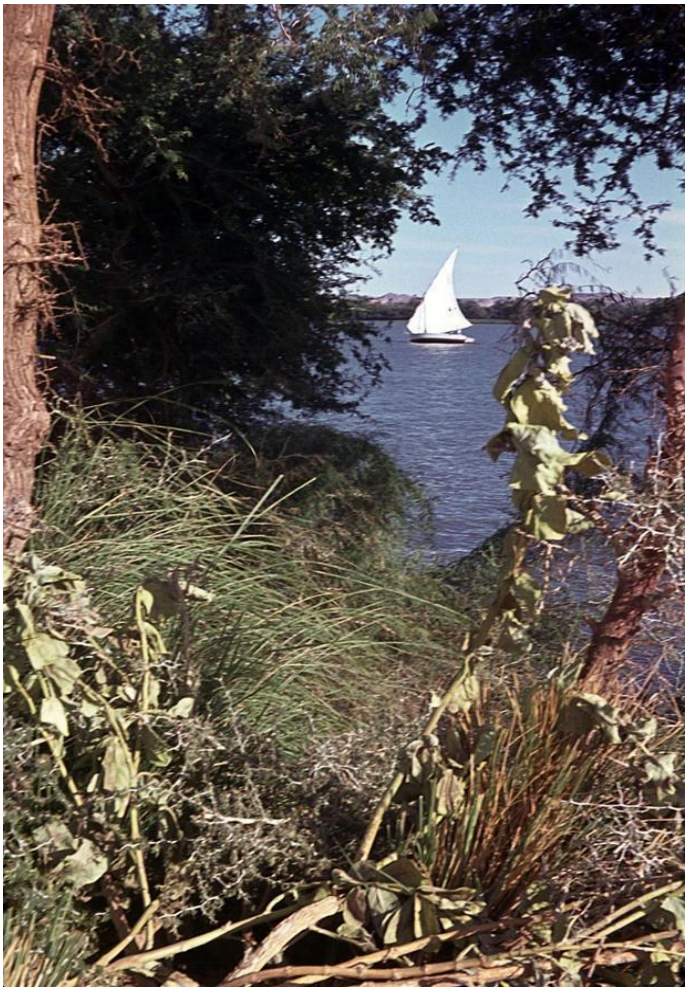
Channel



Curator of the Cataract

Inscription

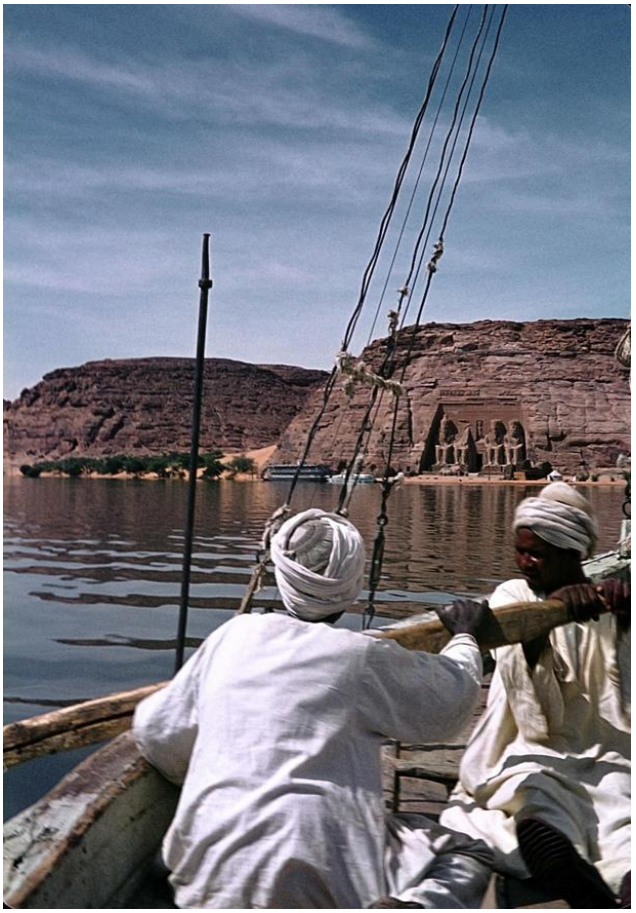
Buhen Temple



The river at Buhen

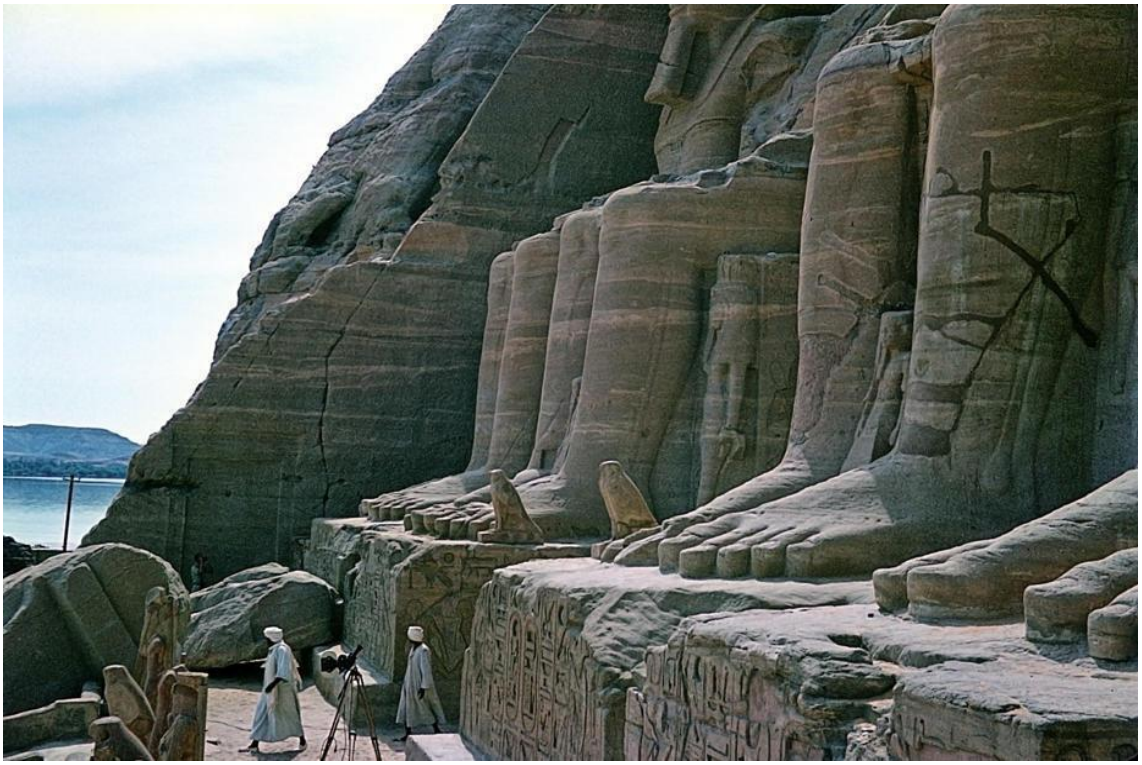
Egyptian desert

Egyptian border

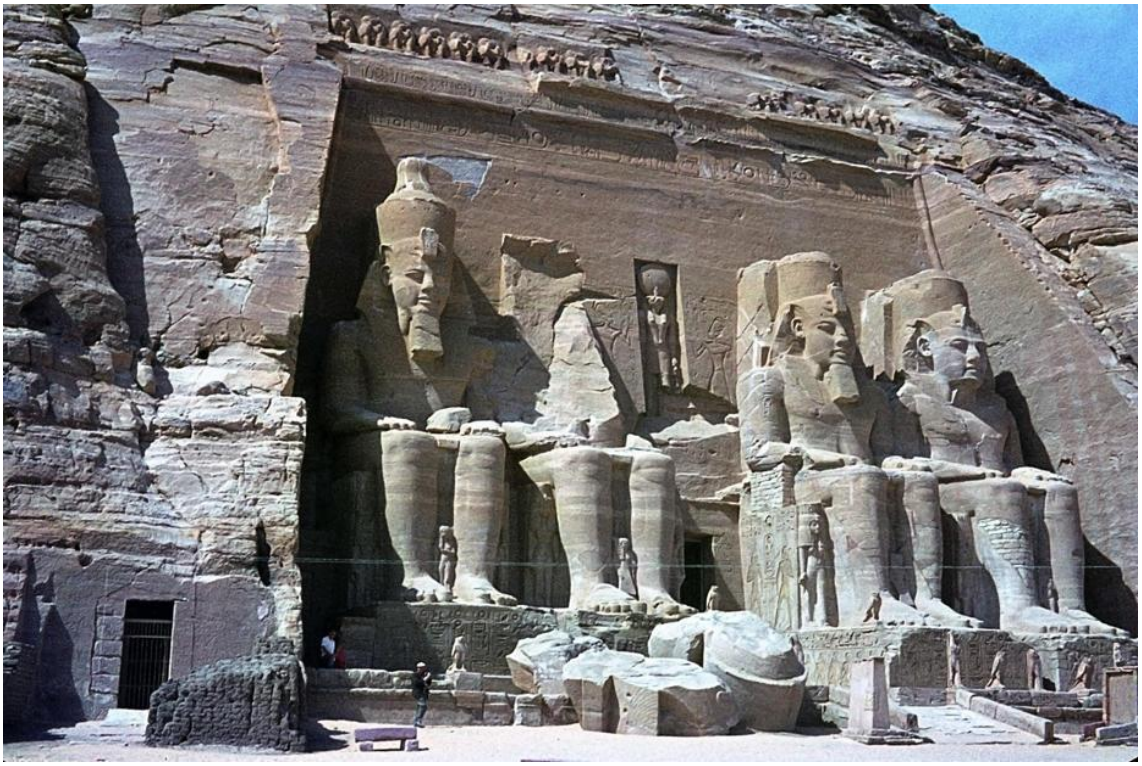


Abu Simbel, ferry to the West bank

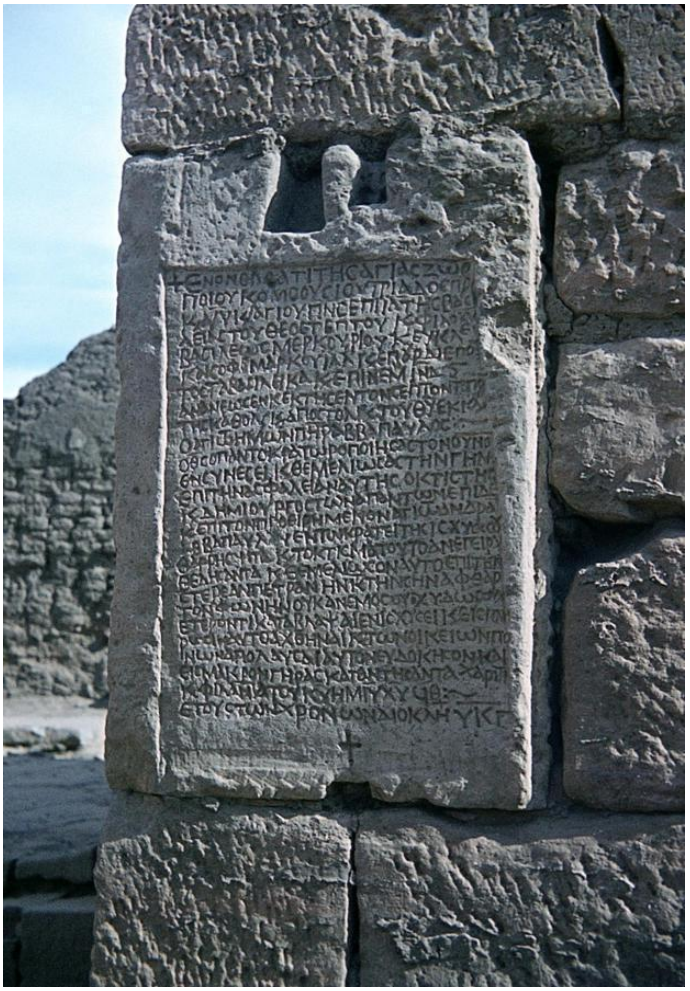
Helmsman



Pharaoh’s feet



Temple of Pharaoh Ramses the Second



Cathedral inscription

Temple of Queen Nefertari

Back in Sudan, Faras West

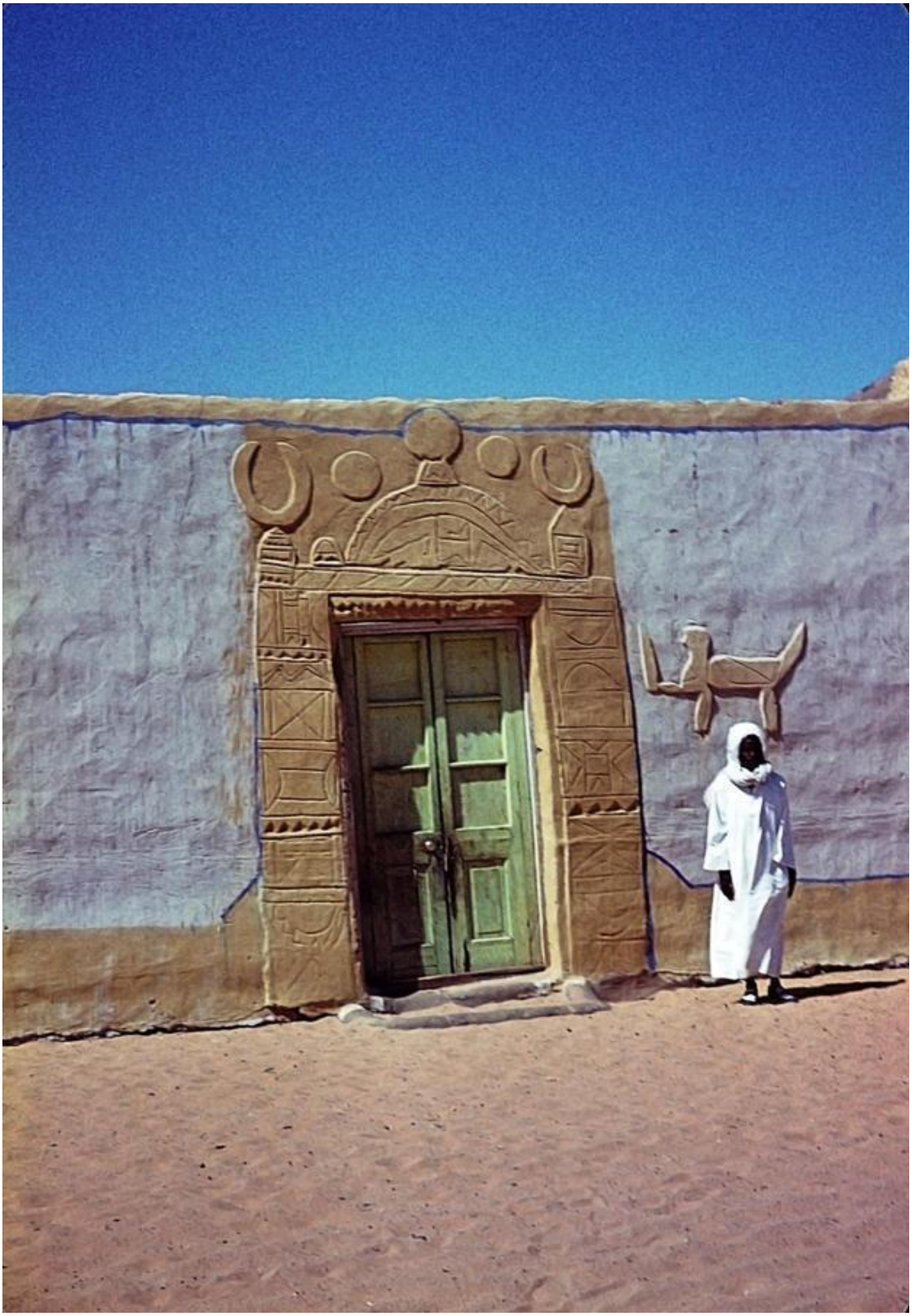
Faras Cathedral pulpit

Fresco of Anna, mother of Mary

Argin house decoration

The Omda of Argin (centre), with the village baker (right)

Argin doorway with plates

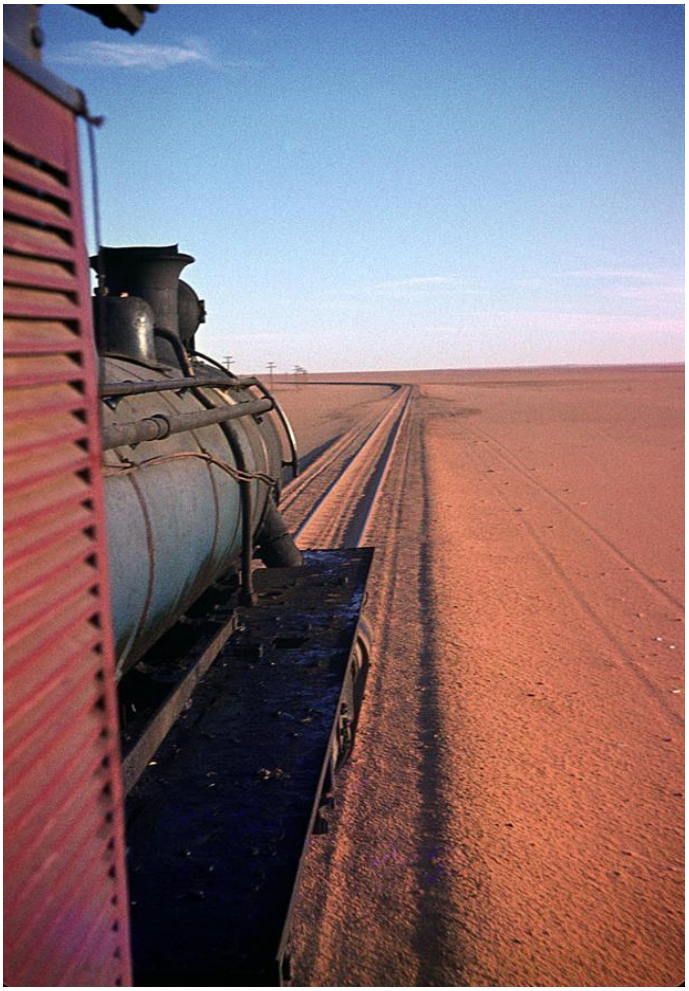


Front door

Halfa children dressed fo Id

Celebrating Id

Farewell to Nubia



Going South from Halfa

ENGLISHMAN ON A TRAIN

As far as I know, this story is not true. I made it up for a 'laila sahira' (concert evening) at Khartoum Secondary.

In the 1920s a British District Commissioner was travelling from Khartoum on return to his post in the Northern Province. He was on a train that would stop at Abu Hamad at 2.30 in the morning on its way to Wadi Halfa on the Egyptian border. Before sleeping at 10 he called the Nubian sleeping car attendant and gave instructions.

"I want you to be sure I get off the train at Abu Hamad. Unfortunately I am very bad-tempered when I am woken in the middle of the night. I apologise for any rude thing I may say to you. My father had a bad temper too and, as we know, human nature cannot change. Get me off the train at all costs. Here are 25 piastres. Thank you, and good night."

When the DC woke the next morning, the train was not moving and the sun was streaming in through the shutters. He looked at his watch, then out of the window. Horrors! It was 8 o'clock and they were at Wadi Halfa.

He rang the bell. The attendant came and the DC cursed and swore for several minutes. The attendant replied quietly, "Janabak (Sir), indeed it is true that you have a very bad temper. But not so bad as the Englishman I put out of the train at Abu Hamad."

WHY ARABIC AND WHY SUDAN?

People often ask how I came to speak Arabic, and what made me choose to work in Sudan.

My first view of the Arab and African world was from the British troopship 'Empire Pride' in Port Said harbour, Egypt, in August 1953 when I was 18. In those years all boys, on leaving school, had to do two years of National Service in the armed forces. Two thousand British soldiers were on their way to the Far East. I was a Gunner, the lowest form of life in the Royal Artillery, posted to Hong Kong for sixteen months. 333 of us slept in hammocks on the lowest deck below the water line. So the prospect of going ashore at a port was attractive, the first time on land since Liverpool. However this was forbidden. Evidently it was a sensitive political situation, and the British authorities felt we would cause trouble. We were also strictly forbidden to trade with the small boats that rowed up to our ship in the harbour.

Of course some of our troops could not resist. A rope was thrown up to the deck from a boat, goods were pulled up in a basket, and money sent down. Then a violent argument broke out, and one of our soldiers emptied a bucket of water on the Egyptian boatman. He back-paddled some metres, and from under his seat drew a store of empty glass beer bottles, which he hurled with accuracy at all of us looking over the rail. The British Army took cover to a man as these bottles flew over our heads and shattered against the iron bulwarks. It only ended when an Egyptian policeman patrolling our deck levelled his rifle at the boatman and ordered him away.

As we steamed through the Suez Canal hundreds of British soldiers stood on the bank waving and cheering. We waved and shouted back. It was a snapshot of a British-controlled world that left me with some unease.

Three years later when President Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal, Churchill is said to have remarked to Prime Minister Eden, "We cannot have that malicious swine sitting across our communications." Nasser used equally abusive language about the British.

I had been brought up to love my country and believe the British Empire was a force for good. Yet the further East I travelled, the plainer it became that nations wanted to say good-bye to our rule. India, Pakistan and Ceylon had already done so. Across the border of Hong Kong, a British colony, Mao Tse Tung had seized control of China in the name of Communism. I was puzzled about the reasons for all this.

Meanwhile it was a wonderful experience to see some of the countries of the East. We were allowed to go ashore in Colombo, capital of Ceylon, as Sri Lanka was called then. Some of us had two weeks at a transit camp in Singapore, before flying to Hong Kong by Dakota, with a refuelling stop in Saigon, Vietnam. Hong Kong itself was an enjoyable place to live and work, and I went with friends on a day visit by boat to the Portuguese colony of Macau.

On return to Britain there were eight months to fill before I took up my scholarship at Cambridge. I applied for a summer teaching job, and the agency sent me details of forty

schools with vacancies. I chose the one with the most romantic address: Mourne Grange, Kilkeel, County Down, Northern Ireland.

Behind the desire for travel and adventure was a restlessness. I had been brought up as a Christian. But there were areas of turbulence in the world, and in my own life, which made me doubt whether faith really worked. For instance, Communism had taken over in China, and Christianity was in retreat. On the home front, I knew my attitude to my younger brother was not Christian and I didn't know how to change it.

At Mourne Grange the cricket master was a cheerful Irishman called Lloyd Mullen. I assisted him with the cricket, and in looking after eleven boys, whom we supervised in an annexe of the school. After 'lights out' for the boys, he and I had long talks. He told me stories of communists and capitalists finding a faith-based change in their motivation, and of white and black likewise in Southern Africa. He was also the first Christian I had met to be deeply honest about his own failings and where he had found change. This had happened through his contact with Moral Re-Armament.

I discovered he took a full hour before breakfast to listen in silence for divine guidance. This gave him a sense of peace which I certainly lacked. One evening, to my embarrassment, he asked me to listen with him. As I sat there with pen and paper, no inspiration came. In the following days I tried to draw him into theological arguments which would prove that I was pious enough already. He simply suggested I write Absolute Honesty, Absolute Purity, Absolute Unselfishness, and Absolute Love, at the head of four separate sheets of paper, and ask God to give me a reading of where I stood.

As I started to write, the truth came out like the Blue Nile in flood. The shame of wrong relationships and habits, of selfishness and pride. The anger of God at my sin and hypocrisy, but also the promise of a different life if I chose to listen and obey. As I read my thoughts to Lloyd, there was a sense of cleansing and forgiveness. Yes, there were letters of apology to write, an unhelpful photo to burn, things to put right, and confessions to make to my family. But it seemed that God could also guide, morning by morning, towards a new lifestyle.

Lloyd told me his feelings about English snobbery as an Irish country boy on his first visit to London. That made me think of my ignorance about the Irish and what they felt, my scorn as a Protestant for Catholics, and my patronising attitude towards people of other races and religions I had met on my travels. Yes, I was keen to recommend Christianity to others. But to the Chinese in Hong Kong, Christmas must have been the time when the British army got twice as drunk as usual. Of course that wasn't the whole story, but maybe British control was enough to make China clutch at Communism. "As I am, so is my nation" said Lloyd. There was an apology due to my younger brother for being domineering. Could it be that Britain, for all our merits, was sometimes that kind of elder brother?

As I started at Cambridge with this new self-recognition, natural friendship began to grow with students from Asia, Africa and the Middle East. One was a law student from Egypt called Mohammed Hassouna. He was the first Muslim I ever met. I joined the Arab Society and the African Society as an associate member.

Autumn 1956 saw the “Suez Crisis” when Prime Minister Eden deceived Parliament and people, and took Britain to war with Egypt on the basis of a secret agreement with France and Israel. President Nasser of Egypt had his faults too, but for Britain it was an act of dishonour. There were furious demonstrations across the country, even in Cambridge which had the reputation of being politically sleepy. Fortunately, United States President Eisenhower told the British Government to get out of Egypt immediately, or the pound sterling would collapse. The fighting was over in a week and the British withdrew.

Suez shook me deeply, as it did many people of my generation, whether on the Left or the Right of politics. Our fathers had fought the evils of Nazism and won. There were obvious evils in Soviet Communism too. Now we could see that our own country also was capable of evil. Those of us with religious ideals would keep trying to live them, but what impact could that make on ideologies and governments? As for my friendship with Middle East students, that seemed to be finished.

Meanwhile it was time to think about my career. I was studying ancient Greek and Latin for my first two years and planned to read Theology for the final year. Yet my heart was engaged more and more with the Middle East. I was helping a Libyan student with his English. It was hard going for him. One morning in my time of quiet I wrote, “Why do these people always have to learn English? You could learn Arabic.” This thought was soon forgotten in my 1957 long vacation, as I started dutifully on the theology books.

When my friends talked about “giving your life for what God wants to happen”, I felt a bit smug. I planned to become a priest in the Church of England. I still think that is a wonderful profession. But was it really right for me in the light of what my heart said about the Middle East? Someone gave me a new angle on plans: you could say either “I have a plan for my life and God has a part” or “God has a plan for the world and I have a part”.

One day, I laid aside all my career plans and decided on a really honest time of quiet. The first question I wrote was “What does God want to happen in the world?” Answer: “a bridge of trust between Britain and the Arab world before it is too late”. The second “What is my part?” led to the response “Change your studies to Arabic, and go where British people are still wanted to serve in the Middle East before it is too late.”

My family thought I was crazy, and a few clergymen were disappointed. But the Professor of Arabic, Arberry, when I told him my motives, said humbly, “Yes that bridge of trust needs rebuilding, and your generation must do it, because mine is now discredited.” Arabic study was a delight as well as a sweat, and I gained a First on the work of that year. The Middle East students realised I was serious about my ideals, and friendships were restored.

But where to find work in the Middle East less than two years after Suez? My father, who had been giving me money for university expenses, said this would stop at the end of my last term. I explored the possibilities of Iraq, Egypt, and other countries without success. Then someone mentioned Sudan.

I had two older British friends who had recently been welcomed to Sudan on the basis of Moral Re-Armament. On June 1st 1958, three days before the end of my time at Cambridge, and with hardly anything in my bank account, I somehow found myself talking with the Sudan Ambassador, Awad Satti, in his London office. It turned out he had been the

first Sudanese Director of Education before Independence, and he told me British people were needed to teach English in Government secondary schools. On September 1st, I was on a plane to Khartoum with a five-year contract from the Sudan Ministry of Education.

EGYPT

During the next eight years in Sudan I made a number of visits to Egypt, and in Sudan several Egyptian teachers became good friends. One of them was a Copt called Girgis Muharib Rizk. For a year in Port Sudan I lived next door to him and his wife in a block of flats belonging to a Yemeni. Muharib means warrior, and Girgis was that. A brilliant teacher of science and a strict disciplinarian, he upheld standards with a combative approach towards students and fellow members of staff.

The moment came for me to apologise for what Britain had done to Egypt in 1956 and to explain why I was in Sudan. As we got to know each other, the national antipathies melted away, and he seemed to mellow as a person.

At a certain point Girgis performed the greatest act of practical kindness I have ever received, outside my family. It happened like this. After 15 months at Port Sudan I started to feel unwell. On the train to Khartoum for Christmas with friends I developed a high fever. From hospital in Khartoum I was flown back to Britain for several months' recuperation. Girgis settled affairs with the Yemeni landlord, packed up my possessions, arranged storage for them, and refused to take any money for himself. All I could do was offer him anything he liked from my household goods. He chose the blue dinner service. Later both he and I were posted to Khartoum Secondary School. While I was still in UK, he arranged for my belongings to be transported to storage in Khartoum.

One day he took me on a family outing with his wife and daughter to Jebel Awlia, the dam on the White Nile, South of Khartoum. Twenty-five years later, on a visit from Britain to Egypt, I found his name in the Cairo phone book and went to visit. There he was, frail and old, with his wife and a baby granddaughter. After tea and talk, his wife opened a cupboard door and showed me the blue dinner service.

For my first visit to Egypt in 1961 I wanted to visit the Canal towns that had suffered from British bombing. A British friend Patrick Rohde was teaching in Port Tewfik in Suez so I stayed with him a few days, and later took a bus north through Ismailia to Port Said. Not knowing where to start, I went to the Ministry of Information and met the man in charge. He told me that the night after the British occupied the town in 1956, he organised a squad to paste up ten thousand poster photos of Jamal Abdel Nasser on the walls of Port Said. A few days later he was passing a barber shop and saw a 19-year old British soldier having his hair cut, with his rifle leaning against the wall behind him. "It was my duty to shoot him," he told me, "but he was so young I couldn't do it".

We talked a long time, then he called a military vehicle with an enormous picture of Nasser on its side, and took me round the town to show me the rebuilding. I found lodgings in the town and wandered through the streets, sometimes greeting people with an "As-salaam alaikum" (Peace be with you) and receiving a "Wa alaikum as-salaam" in return. A group of carpenters invited me into their workshop. Word got round that an Englishman was there and a crowd gathered outside. They started to shout patriotic slogans with great emotion and some hostility. I roared back in Arabic, "God is greatest (Allahu Akbar); he is so great he can change the English!" and we parted as friends.

I visited Cairo, and then found my Cambridge friend Mohammed Hassouna in Alexandria. He had taken a close interest in my decision to change my studies to Arabic, and we had a lot to catch up on from the last three years. He was building his expertise as a commercial lawyer. I then took a ship to Athens. On the voyage I fell into talk with a Greek who, along with other foreign merchants, had had his business sequestered after Suez. I apologised for Britain's tragic mistake of invasion that had cost him his livelihood. As we were gazing out over the Mediterranean, he turned his face to me and said, "Why did you stop? That was the mistake."

Since then I have met Egyptians who feel that Nasser had a bitter side to him that provoked the West unnecessarily. Perhaps the British, like St Paul, need to consider ourselves the chief of sinners, without claiming a monopoly of sin. On one of my visits to Cairo I stayed in Dokki and enjoyed walking slowly in the area. A cinema manager returned my Arabic greeting and asked where I was from. When we talked about Sudan, North and South, he said sadly, "Before the British came, everything up to Uganda was ours." A former imperialist can always recognise others with imperial instincts.

The Egyptian sense of humour is one of many things I enjoy about their country. A cartoon in a Cairo newspaper showed a huge man selling train tickets through the tiny window of a small office, part of a railway station. The little boy says to his father, "How did that man get through the window into the room?" "He didn't," says the father, "They built the room around him."

And then there's the awesome span of history. An Egyptian friend once took me out to dinner near the Pyramids, silent in the moonlight, so different from the throb and glare that surround them by day. Three thousand years ago, when Abraham's great-grandson Joseph was prime minister of Egypt, the Pyramids were already fifteen hundred years old.

Then there's the Christian history and the Muslim history, and the European generals who have come and gone, from Mark Anthony to Napoleon, Kitchener, Rommel and Montgomery. A country of ancient wisdom and modern vitality.

Long before the Suez war of 1956, decades of British domination and Egyptian resentment made for a poisonous relationship between our two countries. In the last sixty years there have been effective bridge-builders on both sides. It is work in progress.

President Ibrahim Abboud with President Nasser

Casting the net into the White Nile

White Nile, Jebel Awlia Dam. Girgis Moharib with wife and daughter and local lads

A BRITISH OFFICER

Jim Baynard-Smith is the son of a British tea-planter in Ceylon. He grew up as a dutiful son of the Empire. This included two years of compulsory National Service in the British army. In 1947 at the age of 18 he was posted to Khartoum as an officer with his regiment The Green Howards. He was stationed in the South Barracks by the Blue Nile under the command of Colonel Fitzroy-Smith. A strong disciplinarian, the Colonel was also renowned in the regiment for his fairness and his faith. When a soldier was brought to his office by the Sergeant-Major on a charge of misconduct, he would hear the case carefully, then tell the Sergeant-Major to wait with the accused on the veranda while he 'listened to God' alone for the right decision. One day Second-Lieutenant Baynard-Smith passed the group on the veranda several times and finally asked the Sergeant-Major what the delay was. The reply came: "It seems the Almighty has a lot to say this morning."

Jim was already a man of faith, but this quality of servant leadership was new to him. After a talk with the Colonel, he took up the discipline of a time of quiet prayer each morning. Not long afterwards he was selected to be Aide-de-camp (ADC) to the Governor-General Sir Robert Howe. His duties included mounting a horse at six in the morning to accompany Lady Howe on her daily ride to the Sunut Forest by the White Nile. For the rest of the day he was on duty at the Palace for whatever the Governor-General wanted. He travelled with him to other parts of Sudan, including Bentiu and Fanjak in the South. It was good training, with a cheerful social life as well.

When he started at Oxford University Jim went deeper into the process of change that had started in the South Barracks. With fresh honesty he saw that much of his conduct was far from Christian, and his attitude towards the Sudanese had been patronising. He became ready to meet Africans on the basis of listening and learning, and also restitution for past indignities. One of his friends at Oxford was Yahya Abdel Rahman El Mahdi, a grandson of the Mahdi.

On graduating, Jim became unofficial ADC to the founder of Moral Re-Armament, Frank Buchman. He travelled with him to Asia, Australia and New Zealand. It was an adventurous life, also an exacting one. There was no salary, and everyone shared what they had. One extra benefit for Jim was meeting Sally Hore-Ruthven who later became his wife. Her father was a retired Army officer, who had been in Khartoum in 1909 to help train the new Sudan Defence Force.

In 1957 Yahya's brother Ahmed El Mahdi came to an MRA conference in Mackinac Island, Michigan. He returned to Sudan with such a spirited account that Prime Minister Abdullah Khalil sent him back there with the Speaker of the Parliament, Mohammed Salih Shangitti, and the Minister of Information, Mohammed Ahmed Abu Sinn. On Abu Sinn's recommendation, the Sudan Government bought three copies of MRA's all-Africa film Freedom. They felt it would be useful for nation-building. In early 1958 they invited Jim and a British colleague David Hind to Sudan for a period of several months to show it to individuals and audiences. Jim still says, "It was good to be back by invitation, not occupation".

As I prepared to go to Sudan later that year, Jim gave me names of people he knew, some of them in senior positions. I felt it would be enough to learn my new job. I was too

junior to meet eminent people. Jim put it to me that any ordinary person can take responsibility for the country they are in; also, people in public life who want to do God's will need encouragement. With his ADC background he gave me a good start in the disciplines and courtesies required. He was a faithful letter-writer, and visited Sudan three times while I was there, giving me encouragement and correction. In the decades since, he and his family have given valued service to Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya and other independent African countries, while maintaining his Sudanese friendships.

The Palace garden, 1949. L-R: Jim Baynard-Smith, with Governor-General Sir Robert Howe and Lady Howe

KHARTOUM SECONDARY

The South Barracks were at the East end of Gordon Avenue and to enter you went under a railway bridge. In the years of British rule, many civilian Sudanese found jobs in the barracks as sweepers, gardeners and cooks. They came out of the barracks speaking what the educated Sudanese called 'Ingleezi taht el kubri - English under the bridge.'

Soon after Sudan's Independence, the street was renamed University Street (Shari El Jamia), and part of the South Barracks became Khartoum Boys Secondary School. It was a long line of army buildings, which the Sudanese likened to a train. I was posted there for a term in July 1959, and for three years in November 1960.

Many of the men who had worked for the British army were still there. For instance, Mohammed Hassan, the murasla who looked after the English Department was universally known as Gilbert, after the British sergeant-major he had once served. Some of these men lived in the nearby village of Burri. In visiting their families I heard legends about the British. For instance an army captain had given £100 to a servant in the barracks for his pilgrimage to Mecca, a sum more like £1000 sterling today. It was important that we younger British arriving after Independence should realise there were British in the imperial days who were loved and admired.

The school cafe was run by Khalid, a bearded elder from Koboshia near Shendi. In addition to hot and cold drinks he served 'ful' (brown bean) sandwiches for breakfast. Ismail was one of the cooks in the school kitchen which provided lunch and supper for the boys who were boarding. Yousif was the sergeant, retired from the army, who rang the bell for the end of classes and enforced discipline. Zain and Babikr were among the 'farrashin' (cleaners). Agib was the night-watchman. The 'nobutchi' (duty) teacher in the evening had to talk to him, and check that the evening meal was up to standard. I campaigned successfully for Agib to be provided with an overcoat for the cold winter nights.

The headmaster when I first came was Mohammed Ahmed Abdel Gadir. Later came Abdel Gadir Ibrahim Tolodi and Abdel Bagi Mohammed Abdel Bagi. Ibrahim Shibeika was deputy head. Ali Tawfik, the Maths teacher, created a fine garden in the school. Fawzi was head of History, and my Egyptian friend Girgis was head of Science. Awad Karrar, head of Art, told amusing stories about the people of Shendi where he came from. "Nas Shendi mutafalsafeen shwaya - Shendi people like to add a little philosophy. Two of them were watching a train passing through. One said 'That train is going fast'. The other replied 'Yes, especially first class.' "

The head of English was an Irishman Dick Oates. Among the Sudanese in the department were Salah Suleiman and another called Mirghani. There was also a Scotsman Frank Collier, a Welsh woman Eurwen Price whose husband taught Philosophy in the University, and me an Englishman. When the 5-nation rugby championship took place in Europe, we khawajas persuaded the Sudanese to support France. Collier and I once challenged the Arabic department to put up two swimmers for a race against two of the English Department at a school swimming gala. When they refused, we staged a race between Scotland and England, each of us wearing a jalabiya (the traditional long white gown). The race was tied.

One of the Arabic teachers, Ibrahim Abdel Ghayoum, also had a desk in our office. He used to write a short daily column 'Ala addarb – On the path' in one of the Arabic newspapers.

There were about five hundred boys, perhaps a quarter of them boarders, and all Muslim except for a very few Coptic Christians. The school being in the capital and close to the country's one university made the pupils very political. I came to realise that, in every class of 36, a quarter were likely to be committed Communists, and a quarter committed Muslim Brothers. The other half were what the Communists called "Pepsis", that is people who wanted a good time and were not bothered about changing the world. A Muslim Brother in his second year, Ali Osman Mohammed Taha, (a future Vice-President of Sudan) once interviewed me for a wall newspaper he was producing in the school.

As part of ensuring that my pupils could describe in English everything they experienced in Arabic, I would make them learn vocabulary lists of the fruits in the market. In one class a highly intelligent boy refused to answer any of the questions. Later while the others were writing, I quietly asked him what was the matter. "In my home we don't have fruit" came the answer. He was clearly resentful that a comfortable young foreigner could talk so lightly about food beyond the reach of his Sudanese father. This made me more sensitive to the marks of poverty - the lined face, the creased shirt worn for a week. The world did need changing, and it still does. Incidentally, this boy became a high court judge. Many years later he and I were among the dinner guests of another Khartoum Secondary ex-pupil. We smiled across the table when a dessert of mixed fruits was served.

Do his generation, in their success, still have a passion for the feeding of today's hungry stomachs, minds and hearts?

As a teacher, and especially as a foreigner, it was important to avoid political issues. But there was scope in English for exploring the moral issues that underlie personal and national life for all of us. Another ex-pupil of those days, El Fatih El Kogali, remembers a subject set for English Composition: "Ana ameer wa anta ameer wa man yasoug al-hameer? - If I'm an Emir and you're an Emir, who is going to look after the donkey?" A Yemeni friend taught me this piece of wisdom.

In summer 1963, instead of returning to UK for annual leave, I went to Kenya. I will say more about this later. Back in Khartoum Secondary I spoke to a second year class about Kenyatta, Obote and Nyerere, the leaders of Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika, who I had seen at the inauguration of the University of East Africa. I urged my pupils to show as much interest in the African South of their continent as they did in the Arab North. My serious lecture was interrupted by Mohammed Ahmed El Haj who put up his hand and asked, "Sir, when you were in Nairobi, did you see Cliff Richard?" I had never heard of Cliff Richard, but have since learned he is an English singer of similar fame to Mohammed Wardi!

Among British teachers in Sudan there was a dispute as to whether it was right to teach Shakespeare. This happened in Fourth Year for those who opted for English Literature in the Sudan School Certificate Examination. One argument was that this was an outdated form of English the students would never use again. In Khartoum Secondary we teachers took the view that Shakespeare was a treat they deserved at least once in their lives. For those who chose Literature it was our duty to offer the best they were capable of.

One year ‘Macbeth’ was the set book. I started by reading the first two pages aloud to the class. Everybody looked miserable. Then I slowly decoded the language from the beginning. Very soon they were eagerly living into the great themes of kingdom, power, glory, and human weakness, all clothed in majestic poetry. Some of them won Distinction in the exam. Many years later an ex-pupil came to see me and I took the chance to ask what he felt about studying Shakespeare. He replied, “I enjoyed the Shaw play first time but did not want to read it again. I re-read the Shakespeare twelve times, and every time I got more out of it.” One morning I received a message from Omdurman Girls Secondary asking me to stand in for a lesson on ‘Romeo and Juliet’, as their teacher was ill. It turned out to be one of the most romantic passages. Obviously the girls also relished their Shakespeare.

In the next pages are two compositions which show what our pupils were capable of at their best. In the first, there are a few mistakes of spelling and grammar which I have not corrected. Following is the English Language paper which I set for the School Certificate Examinations of 1964.

ON STRIKE

Taj el Din Ibrahim Omer. Khartoum Boys Secondary

I have witnessed and participated in many strikes, but none of them has affected me like the first strike I was involved in.

I was a first year pupil at Merowe Intermediate School at that time, rather anxious and embarrassed by the new environment of the intermediate school. I used to believe that the intermediate school is the place where only geniouses* are admitted and by a piece of good luck I was admitted there. The fourth year boys were much older than I am, they smoke, they have moustaches, they go to weddings and snap their fingers over the dancing girls. That is why I used to consider them as wise, highly educated and complete adults.

It was during breakfast when one of the fourth year boys leapt on a table and clapped his hands for scilence*. Then, taking the table as a pulpit he gave the following speech which I still remember: "Fellow students, you know that the standard of your food is rapidly declining, you know that the bread was burnt yesterday, you know that 'Ustaz' Ameen practices* illegal and inhuman policy in giving punishments. You know all this and still none of you has dared to protest, So here, and on behalf of the fourth year pupils I ask you to go on strike till this injustice is removed." There was anonimous* agreement to go on strike and although I had not noticed any decline in the food, nor had I been aquainted* to the severity of Ustaz Ameen, I was very pleased with the idea itself.

The headmaster and the staff were not informed of the strike. We simply packed our luggage and waited to be ordered to leave because we were told by our seniors that when people go on strike they should not leave their location till told to do so. The headmaster held a meeting with the fourth year boys next day, and after the meeting the leaders of the strike gave the order to leave.

Believing that I am an intermediate school pupil I was expecting that my father will accept the idea of the strike which had been organised by the most genious*, the highly educated pupils of Merowe Intermediate School. But I was shocked by the violent condemnation with which I was met. I tried in vain to explain the half-poisoned food by which we were fed, the tyrant teacher who has broken two jaws, an arm and a pair of spectacles belonging to some students. In spite of all these lies and other lies concerning the strong opposition I have led against the strike no one in the whole village stood by my side.

My school mate Kamal was suffering the same fate. His father who was a talkative man spread the news over the whole village. He said the real reason of the strike was that we demanded to be fed with grapes, apples and other fruits which we will never taste at home. These false rumours spoiled the heroic atmosphere in which I was living. I was expecting that people will give us the same consideration which was given to Omer, who was a student at Wadi Seidna Secondary School, when he was on strike the previous year against the British Colonialism.

In the second day of the strike my father and Kamal's father forced us to return to school, and there, to my great distress, I found that the moustached fourth year geniouses* were already there, as calm as blind mice with their fathers. [* denotes a wrong spelling]

ARE PRISONS REALLY NECESSARY?

IF SO, WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER THE IDEAL WAY OF RUNNING THEM?

Salah el Din Haj Ali, Fourth Shabi, Khartoum Boys Secondary 1963

There is a saying in Arabic, “If you open a school, you close a prison.”

But I think the saying should run like this, “If you open a prison, you open another school!” because in my opinion prison is the school of life for it contains between its walls the members who failed to pass, for a limit, the examination of life. And as a student fails in school examinations so does the criminal or wrong-doer but in the big school of life. A good father encourages his son who fails in school examinations to try many times till he succeeds; so must the authorities do with criminals by giving them another chance in a school-like prison.

While there is life, so far as is known, there is vice, and there is virtue. Every human being commits vice or wrong. Only the Almighty is the virtuous. While there are poor people and rich people, ill people and healthy people, ugly people and smart people, violence, plunder and crime shall not disappear from the world. So, as I think, there are psychological causes that compel criminals, thieves and prostitutes to commit crime or vice. They were not born as thieves or criminals – for vice is not born with human beings – but certain circumstances compel them to commit it.

So the authorities must run prisons as schools to teach the wrong-doers virtue and love of humanity; a programme of lessons, drills and picnics [days out in the country] must be worked out for them. They must be taught certain jobs each according to his abilities and so they will come out of prison as useful and honourable people. For if they are treated with violence and punishments, they will get more determined to commit wrong, for the door will be shut before them.

As in schools they give a chance to anyone who fails, we must give at least one chance for the wrong-doer who fails in the school of life, for while there is life there is hope.

SUDAN SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

MARCH 1964

English Language Paper 1 Time; 2 hours

Write concisely on any two of the following subjects.

1. 'Every citizen in a modern state should have the benefit of some higher education.' Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Give your reasons.

2. Suppose you won a prize in a public lottery, and were allowed to visit any country you wished for one week, where would you go and what would you do?

3. Describe a local custom that you think is no longer valuable, or describe a foreign custom you have heard about which you think would be worth introducing into the Sudan.

4. A member of your family has committed a serious crime, but has not been detected by the police. Explain what he (or she) has done and then say what action you would take.

5. Who, in your opinion, are of greater value in modern society: poets or engineers?

6. Greed.

7. Suppose you were asked to establish a theatre in your home town: how would you set about it? Remember that by establishing a theatre we mean not only putting up the building but also getting together the actors and putting on plays for public performance.

8. Write out a folk story, i.e. a tale of magic popular among the people of your country that you heard and enjoyed as a child. If you think the story has any special meaning, explain what it is.

9. In some countries many women go to work in factories and offices. Would you like to see this happening in the Sudan on a large scale? Give your reasons.

10. Describe the scene inside a mosque or a church or a synagogue at the time of an important religious festival.

11. Write a description of a visit to the industrial area of a town you know. Try to give a clear description of the streets, buildings and people you would see.

12. Describe one of the following: a law court while a case is being tried; a military march past; a camel market; a journey on a river steamer.

Khartoum Boys Secondary main building, former South Barracks

Staff members. Dick Oates (front left), Sergeant Yousif (back left)

One of my classes

Mohammed Hassan 'Gilbert' and family in their Burri home

Volleyball

Desk in the English Department. Marking, the eternal task

FOOTBALL AND CROSS-COUNTRY RUNNING

Soon after my arrival in Khartoum I was taken to a match in a stadium near the railway station. The spectators were all men, wearing white cotton jalabiyas. When a forward failed to score in front of an open goal, a man near me rose to his feet and bellowed, "Ya akhi – O my brother!" in sorrow as much as anger. How different, I thought, from what is usually shouted at players and referees in England. Later when I played in a team with Sudanese I discovered they too were capable of less civilised reactions.

Everywhere in dusty alleys of Sudan towns and villages you would find children playing barefoot "dafuri" football with a tight bundle of rags for a ball.

In Port Sudan School I was responsible for Suakin House and sometimes played football with the boys. In the great heat I could not run about the field for a full game, but could perform an honourable role as goalkeeper. The pitches were salt flats and the boys played barefoot, so the goalie could dive for the ball without damage.

In our school team at Khartoum Secondary we had a fast winger called Gasim who played for Burri in the National League. He was universally known as Transistor. Our two main strikers were both called Ahmed. One was the son of General Ibrahim Abboud who was now President of the country. The other was the son of Brigadier Mohieddin who had recently mutinied against the President and was in disgrace. In one inter-school match both Ahmeds were in front of the opposition goal. Ahmed Abboud was slightly blocked. Unselfishly he passed for the other Ahmed to score.

Ahmed Abboud sat next to Mamoun Sowar el Dahab in one of my classes. Both went on to be army officers. I also taught his younger brother Mohammed Abboud who became an international banker.

At Khartoum Secondary we had the use of two football pitches on only two days a week. That did not give much chance for sport for five hundred boys. Might cross-country running be the answer? I mapped out a route round the villages of Burri El Mahas and Burri Deraisa, to a turning point at a Dom tree on waste land, then across to the Blue Nile, past the Police College and the Ministry of Education, and back to the school – about four and a half miles, all on sand except for the last half mile.

The headmaster Abdel Bagi gave his full support, and sometimes came on the run himself, as did Awad Karrar, the Art teacher. It was a voluntary activity once or twice a week, but large numbers of the boys came and enjoyed it. One of them was Omer Hassan Ahmed El Beshir. Our fastest runner was Mahdi, son of a Gezira farmer. His problem was that he went at full speed from the beginning and exhausted himself. Then he was apt to drop out of the race before the end. In a team race this would mean that the whole team of five would be disqualified. Mahdi learned to stay with his team until the last half mile when he was free to do a personal sprint.

Hantoub School had a strong cross-country tradition that was upheld by a British teacher called Moore. Unlike me, he was an excellent runner himself, and I corresponded with him about our efforts. He warned me of the danger of thorns. A boy could easily tread on the end of a dead branch lying on the ground; the other end would spring up and project

a one-inch thorn into his leg; it needed to be extracted immediately. This happened to me once.

Another British teacher, Morrison, was in charge of cross-country running at Wadi Seidna School. Together we decided to approach our headmasters about an inter-school championship for the country. This was agreed by the Ministry of Education and, as I remember, nine schools applied. The race would be over our Burri course, with a different finish at the University sports ground.

In the week before the race, during spare periods at our school, I took the team leaders round the course in my car. The Hantoub leader was a short, tough boy called Abbas. In the next few days it seemed he had no intention of showing his team round the course. “How will they know the direction?” I asked. “They will follow me” came the answer.

The Minister of Education, General Talaat Farid (a keen sportsman), came and fired the starting gun at Khartoum Secondary. Then the teachers moved to the University ground. A number of University lecturers had agreed to help supervise the finishing line and record the results. This was fortunate because, as the runners entered the ground, we teachers, who were supposed to be neutral organisers, went crazy yelling on our own school runners. To nobody’s surprise, Abbas and his Hantoub team were the winners.

The cross-country tradition developed at Khartoum Secondary, with an Everington Cup presented for a competition within the school. After I left, a national championship was announced, including the Army and the Police. Khartoum Secondary (among other schools) applied to take part. Our team understood that the race was nine kilometres. When they arrived they found it was nine miles. By running together throughout the race, they came second to the Army, beating the Police and every other school. Nine miles! How often we teachers underestimate what our pupils are capable of.

For a few months at Khartoum Secondary we had a Catholic boy from Rumbek Secondary in South Sudan called Ercolano. A cheerful fellow, we enjoyed having him in my fourth year English class. He was in the North to train with the national Marathon team for the Arab Games in Morocco. Twice a week they ran twenty-six miles in the desert area outside Omdurman, to Wadi Seidna and back. Unlike the others, Ercolano ran barefoot. On return from Morocco he told me the Marathon there was run on tarmac roads. This was too much for his bare feet and he had to pull out before the end.

Cross Country race between schools

Cross-country running at Khartoum Secondary. The Dom tree was the turning point. Tomb of Sherif El Hindi in the background.

Education Minister Talaat Farid (nearer), with Police Commissioner Hamid El Fil

CHRISTIANS AMONG MUSLIMS

Needing to visit the dentist, I made an appointment during a free period at Khartoum Secondary. The outer door of the surgery was closed when I arrived. A servant came and said the dentist's sister had died and he was not seeing patients that day. My inner reaction was annoyance that I had wasted time in a busy day and wasn't going to be treated. A minute later a Muslim patient arrived, a poor man by his looks, who was given the same news. He immediately said "Ya Salaam! (O Peace of God)" in a tone of sorrow and compassion for the dentist. His reaction was much more Christian than mine.

It could work the other way. When I applied for a telephone, there was a long silence from the Ministry of Communications. An Egyptian neighbour explained it was necessary to give a certain official a bottle of whiskey or five pounds. I went to that official and appealed to his sense of justice, making it plain that I would not give a bribe. After a wait of several months I went to speak with the Director of the Ministry without result. Finally I obtained an appointment with the Minister, who asked where I lived. He said, "That is near me. There is a spare line on the pole in our street and you can have it." Perhaps in this instance I was a better Muslim than some in his ministry. Without whiskey, it had taken a year to obtain number 80816.

While Christian and Muslim beliefs differ at some vital points, the way we are commanded to live is very similar. My students would often write about the Prophet Mohammed in their English Composition, stressing his sense of justice, his care for the poor, and his gentleness towards opponents.

In Sudan when a Christian is seen to perform an act of kindness, the Muslim response is sometimes "Shoof al-insaniya kaif (look at the humanity of that)". Muslims believe that Jesus "son of Mary" was the only human being who has lived without sin. Christians are called to reflect that perfect humanity in their lives. We should also recognise when others reflect it.

The Copts are the oldest continuing Christian presence in the Nile Valley. They have a cathedral in Khartoum North. In modern history Italian Roman Catholics have been active in Sudan since the 19th century, particularly in the South, but with a widespread educational presence in the North too, led by the Comboni fathers. The Anglican outreach in the South from the beginning of the 20th century was led by the Church Missionary Society. There was also an American-led Presbyterian church, which put down strong roots in Upper Nile Province. Daoud Abdel Latif told me that one of his tasks as Governor of Equatoria Province had been to ensure that the different church denominations did not trespass on each other's allotted territory.

On my first train journey to Port Sudan I met Rev Philip Abbas, an Anglican priest from the Nuba Mountains. The congregation at Port Sudan Church was about ninety per cent South Sudanese and the rest expatriates. By the early 1960s there were two Sudanese bishops, Elinana and Yeremiah, both in the South.

During my years with the Sudan Ministry of Education there were many British teachers in schools and university, and British people in commerce and other areas of life. Several were active Christians. In the English Department of Khartoum Secondary, for

instance, Dick Oates was organist at Khartoum Anglican Cathedral, Frank Collier sang in the choir, and Eurwen Price and her husband and I were members of the congregation.

Friday was the weekly holiday in North Sudan, and Sunday a working day, so the main service for the expatriates in All Saints Anglican Cathedral was on Sunday evening. There were services at other times in various languages for South Sudanese working in the North. The educated South Sudanese tended to come to the English language service on Sunday evening. I always sat next to a very tall Southerner called Peter Oboy.

Occasionally there were visitors from other African countries at that service, like African National Congress militants from South Africa, some of them on their way to Moscow via Egypt. Prague was another Soviet Union destination for African students in those years.

The Anglican Bishop of Sudan was Oliver Allison, a cheerful enthusiast with long years of missionary experience in South Sudan. The Provost of the Cathedral, George Martin, and his wife Lena had a deep rapport with the British community, and their door was always open to people who needed to talk. George was a man of authority. Once a new British Ambassador made the mistake of informing the Provost that he would not be attending Cathedral services. George said, "You will come, and you will read the first Lesson [Bible passage]." The Ambassador meekly obeyed.

The third clergyman was Rev Prince Albert Hamilton. Originally from British Guiana (now Guyana) in South America, he came to Egypt with the British Army in the First World War. He had an experience of faith during that campaign which led him to become an Anglican priest. He married an Egyptian Christian and spent the rest of his life in the Nile Valley. He ran a Christian bookshop in Khartoum Central.

The Catholic community in the capital, expatriate and Sudanese, were equally well cared for at their cathedral in Nile Avenue, under the leadership of Bishop Baroni from Italy. The Italian headmaster of the Khartoum Comboni Boys School, Father Philip Sina, was a good friend. In 1965 he asked me to give a lecture on Pax Romana Day to the St Augustine Society at the Catholic Cathedral on 'The concept of happiness in the emerging countries.'

The Anglican Church also had a major educational outreach, mainly in the South, but also with Unity High School for Girls in Khartoum. Founded in the early 1900s by leaders of Protestant and Orthodox churches, it had a majority of Muslims pupils, and was respected as a pioneer of women's secondary education. It now takes boys also and has a primary section. I was the Honorary Secretary of its Council, and of the Executive and Finance Committee, from 1963 to 1966.

Attempts by the military Government to Islamise the South in the 1960s involved the expulsion of foreign missionaries, and the changing of the holiday there from Sunday to Friday. Civil war gathered pace in the South, and it was a difficult time for Bishop Allison in Khartoum. He made requests to meet the Minister of Interior in Khartoum and was refused. The exercise was to stand firm on what he felt to be right, and still to observe national courtesies, and keep an open heart to Muslims. One day he attended the mourning ceremony for a senior Muslim politician who had just died, Sayed Abdullahi El Fadil El

Mahdi. There he met the Minister of Interior and other members of the Government and had helpful talks with them.

Muslims would often quote texts from the Quran and the Hadith to me. Occasionally someone invited me to become a Muslim. I came to take this as a compliment that the person was interested in my soul. I would reply that I was content in the Christian tradition; as one of the People of the Book (the Muslim term for Jews and Christians), I respected Muslim tradition.

The Muslim greeting "Peace be with you", like the Jewish "Shalom", was also Jesus's greeting. There is so much that the three religions share. I often use with Christians the deeply satisfying words Muslims say to each other after a death, "Inna lillahi wa inna ilaihi raji'un – we belong to God and to him we are returning." It gives the sense of our life as a journey with an aim and a secure ending.

Muslims are capable of great evil, just as Christians are. The Quran says, "Compete in good works". The Bible says "Admit your faults to one another and pray for each other so that you may be healed".

It is from the Sudanese that I first learned deeply about Islam, not so much as a doctrine, as an experience of faith that transforms life – an experience that Christians should respect as we seek to live out the teachings of our own faith.

December 25th 1958 felt like just one more hot day. At eight in the morning the wooden shutters were closed to keep out the sun. It was my first Christmas without Christians for company. I was in Barakat, headquarters of the Sudan Gezira Board. My hosts were the Sudanese Chief Accountant and his wife, Sid Ahmed Abdullah and Zainab. I had met them first in London, and they had invited me to visit. They could not have been more hospitable. But that day started for me with a sense of desolation. For two weeks I had been far from Port Sudan, where my mail came. So I had seen no cards or presents from family and friends in UK. There was no special Christmas food or decoration in this Muslim home, and in the neighbourhood no church to go to.

So what was the inner meaning of Christmas? In my notebook of daily reflection I wrote, "Christ came to get people to do the will of God unconditionally". This meant giving my life afresh to God. All right, but where did that leave my Muslim friends? "Islam means surrender to God" I wrote. "All faiths meet, not join, at the point where one person decides to do the will of God unconditionally".

At breakfast I told Sid Ahmed and Zeinab what I had been thinking. We agreed that Islam and Christianity and Islam meet at significant points, and we can cooperate on practical issues. That afternoon on my radio I picked up Queen Elizabeth's Christmas Broadcast on BBC World Service, and shed a tear of patriotic joy.

A MUSLIM BROTHER

One morning at Khartoum Secondary I was requested to call on Yousif El Khalifa Abu Bakr at the nearby Publications Bureau of the Ministry of Education, someone I had never heard of. He had been commissioned to produce a programme 'Learn Arabic by Radio' designed for speakers of English. Someone had given him my name. He wanted me to read the English part of the script, which I agreed to do. This would mean meeting in a studio at Radio Omdurman once a week to record three programmes.

At the end of this first meeting Yousif asked in a severe tone, "Are you a member of Moral Re-Armament?" I hesitated. At this time of military government, you were not supposed to be a member of any active movement without official sanction. Besides, MRA did not have registered members. It was an idea you either lived or didn't.

I replied, "Yes. Are you?" "Yes I am," said he. While he was studying Linguistics at Ann Arbor, Michigan, he and his wife had attended an MRA conference on nearby Mackinac Island. As Muslims, they were impressed by the way faith was being translated into action, especially in the tackling of America's racial problems.

On our frequent visits to each other's homes, I learned more of his remarkable story. In the early 1950s Yousif was studying in Egypt. One night the Egyptian police rounded up a great number of Sudanese students and put them into jail on the suspicion of a communist conspiracy. He was not a communist, but as the days passed he considered it seriously as a remedy to such injustice. At this point one of his fellow prisoners talked with him about a wholehearted commitment to Islam, as a better remedy for the world's ills.

Yousif came out of prison a convinced Muslim Brother. He joined the Sudanese Ministry of Education and was sent to teach Arabic in Rumbek, the one secondary school in the South. He was there in 1955 when the Southern Regiment mutinied and Northerners were massacred in several places. Thousands were hastily evacuated to the North, arriving in Khartoum with tales of horror. Yousif refused to be drawn into bitter denunciation. He quietly pointed out that Northerners had their own past record of ill treatment to overcome in the cultural memory of the South.

After our broadcasts, he would often take me to his club in Omdurman. Nadi el Thiqafa (Cultural Club) was run by the Muslim Brothers. An Egyptian, Hassan El Banna, founded this movement in 1928 as an alternative to materialism of all kinds. Through a network of convinced intellectuals, it aimed to match Muslim revelation with modern science as a system of governance for the world. Under the constrictions of military government, the club provided a forum for training young people in Muslim truth, civic virtue, and no doubt political conspiracy. I got to know several of the bright spirits of the movement, and was sometimes asked to show the MRA films.

In 1965 Bishop Ralph Dean, Secretary General of the Worldwide Anglican Communion, visited Sudan as part of a tour of several countries. I discovered there were no plans for him to meet any Muslims and explore that side of Sudan's heritage. He happily accepted my invitation to visit the Mahdi's Tomb, a national landmark in Omdurman, and then to be taken to a tea party arranged by Yousif with members of the Cultural Club. I

could not stay for tea because of teaching duties, but he told me later it was a lively and informative meeting.

Yousif was full of humour and I learned a lot from working with him. I was still nervous about inviting Sudanese to meals. They helped themselves to very little and always refused a second helping. My conclusion was they disliked British cooking and I should not press them. One day I opened the door for Yousif as he left my home after lunch. He murmured to himself in Arabic, with the clear intention that I should overhear, “By God, when you have lunch with a khawaja, it’s as if you were fasting.” Finally I came to understand Sudanese etiquette for a guest. At the start of the meal you wait for the host to pile the food on your plate. When it comes to a second helping, the polite way is to refuse two or three times before accepting.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCE

Sometimes in school a boy asked, “What is the difference between British boys and us? My standard answer became, “Britain is a cold country and boys there fall off their bicycles by going too fast. Sudan is a very hot country, and I see boys here falling off by going too slowly.”

There is an adult extension of this, related to behaviour. When it comes to moral standards like absolute honesty and absolute purity, a British intellectual will often say, “Philosophically there is no such thing as an absolute standard, so I don’t need to try and live by it.” A Sudanese Muslim scholar is apt to say, “Absolute moral standards are in all our holy books,” implying that naturally he lives by them. He gives you a string of holy texts to support his case. But he too sometimes falls off the bicycle, like the rest of us.

I used to receive the airmail edition of The Times newspaper by post from London. One day I distributed pages among my fourth year class at Khartoum Secondary. The idea was to expose them to a modern style of English and let them ask questions about language or culture. Two boys read the page which announces deaths. One asked what was meant by “No flowers please” in several of the announcements.

I explained to the class that in Britain, when someone dies, the custom is to send flowers with a card of sympathy, to be placed on the coffin or near the grave, especially if the sender cannot attend the funeral. In Sudan, where shade temperatures can rise to 50c, flowers have a hard time surviving in the ground. If you cut them, they collapse in about ten minutes. To Sudanese boys, the idea of sending flowers to a funeral was funny enough; to print a notice in the paper saying “No flowers please” was hilarious. After a cautious look to make sure I was not offended, the whole class burst into roars of laughter.

Like any two peoples, the Sudanese and the British often find it hard to understand each other. We should be allowed to laugh at our differences. One evening in Wad Medani, the cotton town, I was taking several pictures of the sun setting over the Blue Nile in its summer flood. A boy nearby said to his father in Arabic, “Why is that khawaja taking photos of the sun?” The reply was, “Because they don't have sun in their country.”

One thing that annoyed me about Sudanese habits was their response to invitations to meals. I would ask them to dinner at 8. Often they would arrive an hour or more late without any apology. After the meal they would leave without saying thank-you. I concluded they had bad manners in this respect. Later I realised they see it from the opposite angle. The Sudanese host thanks his guest for taking the trouble to come. “Sharraftana - you have honoured us.” I have learned to say this truthfully as a host, while still sometimes feeling the Sudanese can do more to respect British etiquette.

In general, British teachers who chose to be sociable with Sudanese often felt the cultural difference was our coldness, in contrast to their warmth and spontaneity. In January 1959 during the New Year holiday I was on a train from Wad Medani to Khartoum. In the corridor I exchanged greetings with a man who turned out to be the Headmaster of Omdurman Girls Secondary, Abdel Rahman Abdullah. He invited me to join his family in their compartment, where we talked happily for hours over rounds of iced lemon drinks, tea and coffee. We neared Khartoum and they asked where I was staying. As soon as they heard

the word hotel, they invited me to stay in their home in Omdurman. A very pleasant four days, before I returned to Port Sudan, gave me a deeper understanding of Sudan at its best. What an amazing example of how to treat a stranger.

Abdel Rahman and I kept in touch by letter. In April 1963 we cooperated on a practical issue. Large numbers of secondary school teachers had come to Hantoub Secondary at the start of the summer holiday to mark the intermediate school final exams. Abdel Rahman was in overall charge of the operation, the marking of about 8,000 papers (as I remember) in each subject. There were vacancies in secondary schools for less than a quarter of the candidates. It was a highly competitive examination.

Abdel Rahman told me I was coordinator of the marking of the English Composition paper. There had been national controversy about one of the subjects on this paper, and he was under pressure from the Ministry of Education to cancel it altogether. But he trusted me when I promised to find a just solution. Our thirty markers, the majority British, worked hard at this, and Abdel Rahman was able to convince the Ministry that the English Composition paper should stand.

Blue Nile at Wad Medani before ...

... during ...

... and after sunset

THEY COME AND THEY GO

(Reflections on the British in Sudan, written for my Khartoum Secondary colleague Eurwen and her husband Dr Hugh Price, Lecturer in Philosophy at Khartoum University, when they left in 1963)

They come for five years or for ten,
For one or forty,
Each but a drop in the inkwell of eternity
But each a stroke in the book
Wherein are all our members written,
And each a chapter brief or long
In the chronicle of a young nation.

The forthright Nuer
the courtly Rizeigat
the sharp Halfawi
the exuberant Beja
Stream through their experience.

And Friday's coffee'd ease in Omdurman,
The leisured trains and somnolent offices
beguile their British time
And half-adapt them to an Arab tempo.

They will remember; and be remembered
Not by what they said
in lecture rooms and in veranda chairs
But by what they were
in a thousand situations,
And what was in their heart
of faith and hope and charity
At each successive challenge.

And so they go; and as they humbly go,
God shall honour their work,
Increase the seed they have sown,
Use each lesson learnt
to enrich the whole world family
And guide their footsteps always.

THE HIGHER TEACHER TRAINING INSTITUTE

Bakht Er Ruda was an educational institute based in a village by the White Nile north of Kosti. Long before independence it was famous in Africa for its training for primary and intermediate school teachers (Years 1-8). But up to 1960 there was no training college for secondary school teachers (Years 9-12). There was rivalry about how to fill this gap. UNESCO had offered help. Nasr el Haj Ali, Vice-Chancellor of Khartoum University, wanted to create a Faculty of Education. The Minister of Education, Ziada Arbab, wanted a higher teacher training institute under his wing. The Minister won, and the HTTI began to take shape on a site in Wad Nubawi to the North of Omdurman.

In 1963 after five years teaching in secondary schools I visited Bakht Er Ruda to see if there was training work I could do there. They had an experienced Head of English called Mustafa and I talked with him and the Principal Mandour el Mahdi.

Soon afterwards, to my surprise, I was appointed lecturer in the English Department of the HTTI. I had not applied for the job, and there were other British teachers who had served in Sudan longer. But the Head of Department, a New Zealander called Bill Barton, said he valued my knowledge of Arabic and my immersion in the national culture. This had enabled me to design teaching material related to the Sudanese mindset.

It was the start of a stimulating three years. Bill Barton stretched my capacity. As well as the training we gave in language skills, he launched me on lecture courses on the history of language, nineteenth century thought in England, prose style, and modern English poetry. The poetry lecture was scheduled at 7 each Monday morning, an effort for the students and for the lecturer who had a nine-mile drive from his home in Khartoum!

If I lacked confidence in my ability at the start, the Sudanese students also needed assurance that they could teach English as competently as any British person. Barton's deputy was John Atkins, who had long service in Sudan and a comprehensive knowledge of English literature. We lecturers sometimes gave demonstration classes at the nearby Ahlia Secondary School.

The four-year course included one year as a trainee in a secondary school somewhere in Sudan. After the annual Sudan School Certificate Examination, 90 new students were enrolled at the Institute each year, making a total of 360. About a quarter were young women, with their separate hostel accommodation on the site. They wore the customary tobe, a white cotton robe covering the head but not the face. They would sit in the front two rows of the lecture room. One of my former pupils at Port Sudan Secondary was in his first year when I arrived, Ahmed El Sheikh from Shendi in the North. His sister Leila was in the year above. The Ministry of Education treated the students as employees and paid them a salary from the beginning.

The Principal of the Institute was Mohammed Tom Tijani, a wise and humorous personality. His deputy was Salah El Din Mileik, previously a senior lecturer in Arabic at Khartoum University. For the first few years UNESCO provided a joint principal from Ireland, and several heads of departments from other countries. For instance Ali Erian from

Egypt headed the Education Department, there was a Danish woman scientist called Petersen, and an Englishman Coggins was responsible for the supply and maintenance of technical equipment.

Earlier I had met Salah Mileik on leave in England where he was studying. On his return to Sudan he and his wife invited me and other guests to a Ramadan breakfast at his home in Omdurman. Plates of food were laid out on the table, and we awaited the firing of the nearby cannon which informed the people of Omdurman that it was sunset and they could eat and drink. I too had fasted that day. Ten minutes into the meal Salah said to me, "Something dreadful is about to happen." A plate of 'marara' was set before me, raw camel liver, garnished with 'shutta' and slices of raw onion. Pink and glistening, it seemed to quiver on the plate like a living organism. English boys are brought up to be brave and not to show their feelings. I summoned what courage I had and took one mouthful, leaving the Sudanese to devour the rest. 'Shutta' is a red gunpowder which Sudanese describe as a pepper. Probably it is also used in the Ramadan cannon.

The campus of the Institute had a barren look in its first years. Its unlovely concrete buildings were spread across a desert area with no trees and little other vegetation. The approach was by a dusty unpaved road and there were no surrounding shops or houses. The staff were bussed in, or arrived in their own cars, from 7 onwards and left about 2, with just the occasional evening function.

In many ways it was the Sudanese clerks, laboratory assistants, sweepers, drivers and messengers who lifted the social tone of staff and students with their cheerful attitude. Chief among these was a driver called Osman who sat on a bench outside the administration block. As he waited for jobs to do, he exchanged jokes and cheeky comments with all who passed.

The teaching staff had a common room in the administration block. The catering was run efficiently by Adam from Darfur and an elderly waiter called Aramram. A mathematics lecturer Mohammed El Sawi ran the staff committee and I was a member. One day we were approached by a clerk called Abdel Rahim, and a lab assistant called Naeem, with the suggestion that we start a staff football team which would include everyone.

The Principal agreed and we went ahead. Hamza, one of the Geography lecturers, was a good player. Naeem had played for Hilal and Abdel Rahim also played well. The rest of us made up with enthusiasm what we lacked in skill. Osman the driver was our biggest supporter.

Another Osman played at right wing. His job was technical assistant to Mr Coggins, and whenever the ball was passed to the right wing the cry of "Coggins!" went up from the Sudanese fans on the touchline. Not wishing to run for ninety minutes in the heat of the afternoon, I was accepted as goalkeeper. When I made a mistake, my team mates shouted at me, and when I made a save they applauded, with a complete sense of social and racial equality. Strangely they also made me President of the Club, which meant I was responsible for making a brief speech in Arabic to our opponents during tea after the match.

It was great fun. Sometimes we played our own students, and once the staff of Khartoum University (we beat them), but mostly it was the villages around the 'Three Towns' of Khartoum, Khartoum North and Omdurman. We had a weekend visit to Sennar

(on the Blue Nile), a 7-hour journey by train, playing one of the town's teams on Thursday and the other on Friday. We won the first 1-0 and lost the other 0-1

A tall goalkeeper like me can make impressive saves to high shots. But if the ball comes through fast at ankle level it is hard to get down quickly. Besides, if the pitch is just a marked area of desert covered with small lava stones, the goalkeeper is ready to forego falls on the low ball. On this occasion we were at the village of Sororab alongside the main Nile north of Omdurman. The young boys of the village who were seeing a 'khawaja' (white man) for the first time gathered behind the goal to cheer on their attacking forwards. When the play was down the other end, they amused themselves by making comments on my personal appearance, not realising I could understand what they were saying. After I had let through two or three goals at ankle level, I overheard one say, "Al khawaja da zei wahid bali ukkaz – That khawaja is like someone who's swallowed a stick."

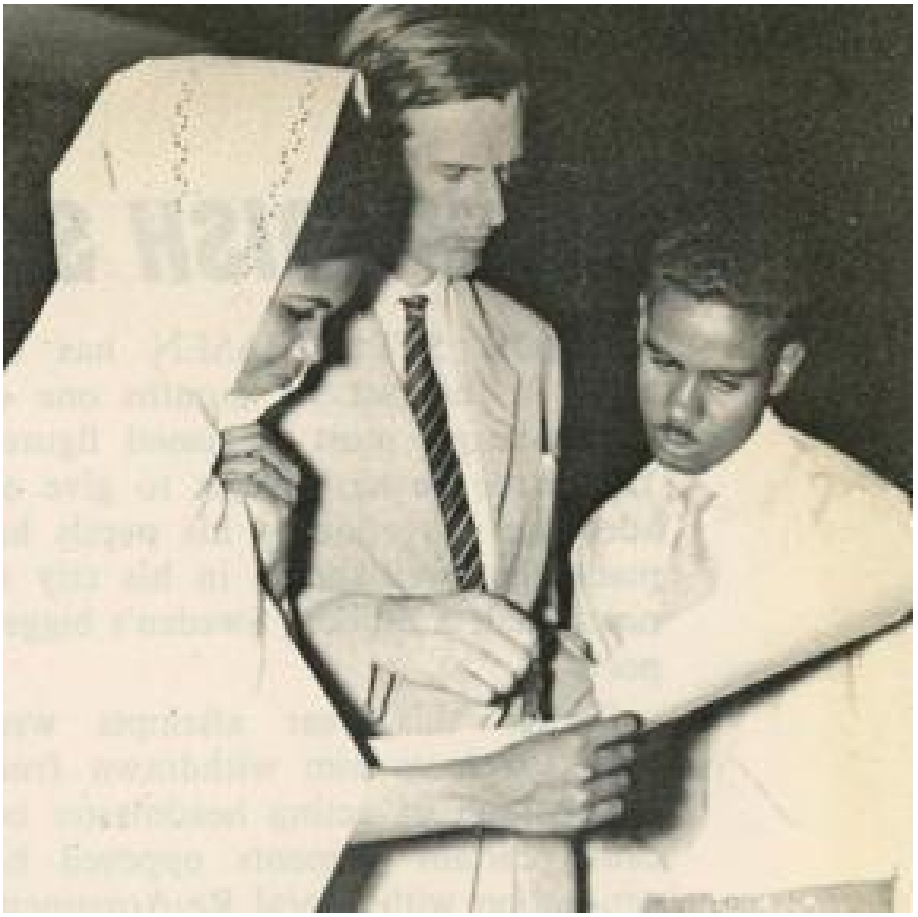
If we lost a game, next morning Osman the driver would ask me why, with pretended fierceness. I replied once "Da kaan daris lena – that was a lesson for us." He replied, "Daris daris? Kull yom daris wa la tualim - Lesson, lesson? Every day there's a lesson and you don't learn."

One of the village teams we played, Iseilat, largely consisted of the young men who washed cars in central Khartoum. Following our match, they and I often greeted each other in town. Once I drove a Swiss guest of mine, a writer, to an airline office in Khartoum. Another passenger was meant to guard the car, but wandered off to look at a shop window, leaving the Swiss man's jacket on the back seat. When we all came back, the jacket was missing. Fortunately his money was in his trouser pocket, but the coat contained his precious diary, address book, and extensive notes on recent interviews with people in neighbouring countries including Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia.

I roamed the streets until I found one of my footballing friends among the car-washers. I explained the great dishonour that had fallen on me through my guest being robbed; he didn't mind about his coat, but it was vital to recover his papers. "I know nothing about all this," said the young man. "Of course you don't", I replied, "but in case you meet anyone who does, my friend is staying at the Sudan Hotel. Please try to rescue me from my shame." That night, wrapped in a piece of newspaper, the diary, address book and notes were left anonymously at the hotel.

The staff football team was just one element that helped the Institute bond as a team.

In 1996, thirty years after leaving, I paid a return visit to the Institute. It had become the Faculty of Education of Khartoum University. The campus had tall trees and flower beds and looked beautiful. None of the teaching staff I had known was there. As I spoke with the current Principal in his office, a messenger came in. It was Osman, the former driver. He had lost an arm in a car crash. His face, marked with age and suffering, still radiated cheerfulness to all comers. A man with little of this world's status and wealth, he was one of those people who hold whole communities together.

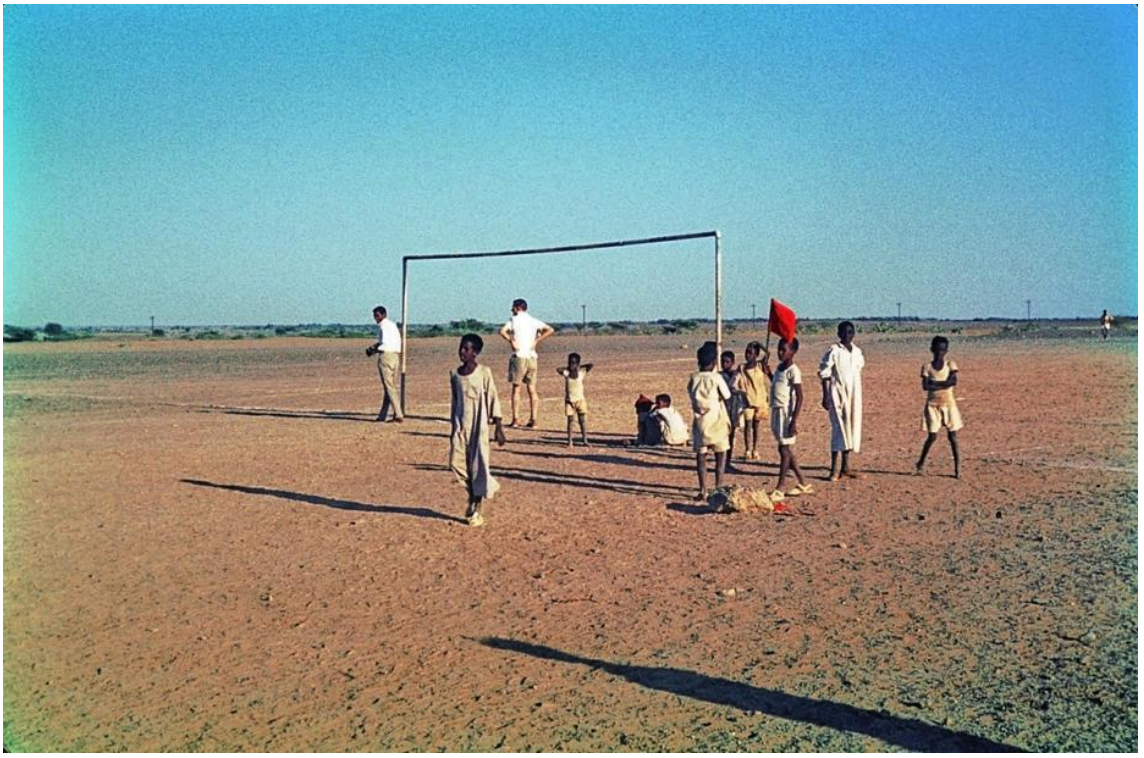


Leila El Sheikh, new graduate of Higher Teacher Training Institute, shows her diploma to the author and her brother.

Ibrahim Kamil, HTTI student

HTTI Staff Football team. Back: left Abdel Rahim, next to him Naeem, Hamza third from right.

Sororab. Institute Staff Football Team before …



... and during the match

On parade at Bakht El Ruda

Bakht El Ruda Institute

THE DAY JOHN KENNEDY WAS SHOT

H.E. The American Ambassador **23rd November 1963**
Khartoum

Dear Sir

I am an Englishman lecturing at the Higher Teacher Training Institute, Omdurman. We have met at the Cathedral.

When the Sudanese students feel anything deeply, they often write on the blackboard just before a lecture to provide a talking point. In one room this morning I found "It is a great loss" and later "He was a victim of his noble ideals".

Strangely it was only a few days ago that, to commemorate the centenary of the Gettysburg Address, I read them Lincoln's famous words. To-day we compared the life of the two men, their fight for civil rights for all (which is what touches the Sudanese most), and the supreme price of brave leadership which both had to pay.

To me as I listened to the unfolding horror of the story on The Voice of America earlier this morning it seemed as if a ray of hope had gone out of the international scene. I believe he will be honoured as the man who had the guts to stand up to communism and at the same time strove with all his might to satisfy mankind's longing for genuine peace. In his most recent fight to maintain the foreign aid programme and carry through integration against all opposition we saw a picture of the warm-hearted, courageous, true America, to which the whole world will yet respond.

John Kennedy was unusual among western statesmen in publicly asking for the help of the Almighty. To-day I am one among millions who ask that God will rest his soul, comfort his family, and lead his country forward in the paths of inspired statesmanship at home and abroad.

Yours truly

Peter J. Everington

—----------

Embassy of the United States of America
Khartoum, Sudan

November 27, 1963

Dear Mr Everington

I was sincerely touched by your letter of November 23 and your expression of sympathy on the death of President Kennedy. Your heart-warming comments upon the life and work of this great man, and your description of the reaction of your Sudanese students, are a source of gratification. Although President Kennedy is dead, his ideals will live and he has left much for which we can be grateful.
On behalf of President Kennedy's family, the American Government and people, I thank you.

Sincerely

William M.Rountree
American Ambassador

DEATH OF A STUDENT

Harran was an Arts student at the HTTI. I remember him as quiet, thoughtful and humorous. He came from the Northern Province. When the lecturer introduced a concept new to him, he would come back immediately with a question or perhaps critical response, always wanting the concept to go through his thought process to see if he could accept it. Of course this is what a lecturer wants, and I greatly appreciated his independence of mind.

When violin classes were offered in the evening on a voluntary basis, he joined. The violin is part of many Sudanese bands as a background to their songs. I realised that our students had heard little or no western classical music. So I offered to come back one evening bringing my gramophone and some records. I put on some Handel, then Mozart, and finally the first movement of Beethoven's Violin Concerto, with David Oistrakh the soloist. Harran was entranced. "Is that the same instrument we are learning?" he asked.

I promised to return the following week and play the second and third movements. But by now the October 1964 uprising was gathering momentum. There was turbulence in Khartoum University and a student called Qurashi was shot dead on the campus. Student marches grew in strength and intensity. They all came past my house on University Avenue (Shari El Jamia) on their way to the Republican Palace.

Finally the Military Government lost patience and banned all demonstrations in that area on pain of death. A crowd of students nevertheless gathered in the Graduates Club in Khartoum. A revolutionary lawyer fired them up to march on the Palace in a further act of defiance. Outside the Palace the Army opened fire. More than thirty were killed immediately and others were seriously wounded.

Next day at the Institute I heard that Harran was in Khartoum Hospital, and that afternoon I went to visit. A number of our students were gathered in the corridor outside his ward. I found him lying with a great number of tubes stuck into his body after a major operation to remove several machine gun bullets. When I complimented him on his courage, he spoke with difficulty, "I would give the last drop of my blood for my country." A little later he asked, "What are the British papers saying about us?" I could only tell him about the vivid accounts on the BBC World Service. But I have felt challenged ever since by his assumption that the British public would want to know about Sudan events, and that our press would be fair. I left him with some words of good cheer, confident that he would make a full recovery. But next morning at the Institute word came that he was dead.

The nation was appalled at this mass killing. The Government had lost all moral credibility, and General Abboud had to hand over to a civilian Government. Not long afterwards a sculpted bust of Qurashi and another one of Harran were put on plinths at the entrance to the avenue of palm trees in the University, as student martyrs of the revolution.

A cloud of sorrow fell on the Institute. We were proud of Harran's bravery, yet wondered if that degree of sacrifice was really necessary. For me it was the first time to be so close to death, let alone a violent death. I had always had an assumption of happy endings. I missed his cheerful personality in the lecture room, and felt miserable that I could never play him the rest of the Violin Concerto.

The sorrow is still there. But I like to imagine him in Paradise, perhaps alongside Beethoven, with access to all the violin music that has ever been performed.

In the next chapter are extracts of three letters I wrote to my parents at the time about the uprising. After the defeat of Abboud's government, there was a mighty struggle among the civilian parties, which had been suppressed for six years, to see who would lead the country. We felt the force of this national ferment at the HTTI, with wall newspapers appearing, and political meetings taking place in the evenings.

One of these meetings had national consequences. It seemed that the communists were best trained and most persuasive. The more traditional parties, some of them with strong Islamic links, were always trying to prove that the communists did not believe in God. At one socialist meeting in the HTTI, a first-year student, in the name of his Marxist beliefs, made a speech blaspheming the Prophet Mohammed. Whether this is a true account of his speech I do not know. But the report spread rapidly round the country. The Communist Party was immediately banned by the new Parliament, and the student was put in prison, partly for his own safety. The imam of a mosque in the nearby suburb of El Thowra was reported as saying in his Friday sermon, "Inna hatha at'taliba khinzeerun fee kulliat al-khanazeer – This student is a pig in a college of pigs." The student had attended one of my first-year lecture courses. I suggested to the Principal that a member of staff should visit him in prison and deal with his confusion about Islam. I do not know if this happened.

Another time, the students went on strike and the Institute was closed for teaching. I came to collect some papers from my office and found the place deserted. At the administration block were a small herd of goats standing on their back legs and eating the paper notices off the notice board. An image of the collapse of civilisation!

We foreign lecturers needed a concern for the well-being of our students, and awareness of what was going on in the country. Yet we had to be careful to avoid any political comment ourselves. It was for the Sudanese to work out the best future of their country. Was there any way we could help in that process?

In the early summer of 1963, Kenya came to self-government, with Jomo Kenyatta as Prime Minister. At the end of the year full independence came and Kenyatta was sworn in as President. Also that year the new Organisation of African Unity was formed, with its headquarters in Addis Ababa, a major step forward for the continent. I spent my annual summer leave in Kenya that year by invitation of black and white Kenyans who were working for reconciliation. Obviously the OAU had many inspiring possibilities.

What part could education play in this urge for a united Africa? I thought with shame of the imperial rivalry between the British and the French, which had been so costly for the continent. While the French had dreamed of a continuous empire from West to East, we British had planned for the same from South Africa to Egypt. In 1899 the two strategies had clashed in Fashoda, South Sudan, nearly leading to war between France and Britain. Now in 1963, how was Sudan going to communicate verbally with its three francophone neighbours - Congo, Central African Republic and Chad? It would be necessary for some Sudanese to start learning French. What about our Institute?

I knew the French Assistant Cultural Attaché in Khartoum, André Ladousse. He said that if there was interest in voluntary French classes at the HTTI, the French Embassy would supply two teachers. I obtained our Principal's agreement and then advertised it to the students. 90 of them signed up for the classes, a quarter of the student body. To my horror, when I returned to the French Embassy, I was informed sadly that they could not after all supply the teachers. I had done well at French in my school, although that was twenty years ago. A Sudanese history lecturer at HTTI had done an advanced degree in France. We divided the students into two classes, and on two evenings a week for a term we gave an introductory course, using a grammar book recommended by André Ladousse.

My eight years teaching in Sudan ended at the end of that term, but I learned two or three years later that the Ministry of Education had introduced French in selected schools for the first time.

LETTERS TO MY PARENTS

26th October 1964

Dear Mum and Dad,

As you've probably gathered, we're passing through a very turbulent time in Khartoum. It started last Wednesday evening (21st) when police invaded the precincts of the University to break up a student gathering. The students refused to play ball and in the resulting clash one student was shot dead, and several on both sides injured.

The next day there were massive but orderly student demonstrations. All schools and colleges came out in sympathy, or nearly all, and in the next days all were closed. But at mid-day on Thursday the ordinary man in the market joined in, and since that time there has been widespread stoning and looting of cars, smashing of shops, bars, a night club, and even places like petrol stations in Khartoum and Omdurman.

There's been a lot of damage, and more lives have been lost, but the army have come in, in a big way, with tanks, armoured cars and troops with bayonets.

The violence is now calming down (though we hear there have been big demonstrations in other towns) and we are moving into the next phase which is massive civil disobedience. It's been estimated that 80% of all Government employees did not go to work this morning, and that includes Bank of Sudan, Railways, and all the various ministries. Abboud came on the radio yesterday appealing for calm and work, but the situation is far gone and one wonders how long the Government can last on this basis.

At any rate I want you to know that all the foreigners including yours truly are perfectly all right (though some of us got stones bunged at our cars on the first day before we realised what was happening. My VW remains unscathed!). There's a curfew every night, but it's now fairly safe to walk in Khartoum avoiding crowds.

Our HTTI students demonstrated on Saturday morning and have now been packed off home indefinitely like all other students. So, as regards work for me, it's a matter of wait-and-see and catch-up-with-reading.

The BBC were wrong this morning in saying that this is an issue of North v South. There's still a merciless struggle going on in the South, but this business is primarily directed against the military regime.

The Government have blamed subversive forces, by which they mean primarily Communism. And certainly some of the advanced techniques of disorder are not native to Sudan.

But, as far as the mob is concerned, it's probably all part of a new wind of change throughout Africa – the dissatisfaction of the labouring classes with the newly rich African leaders who have got rich on independence with European salaries, cars, homes, etc, leaving the masses to deal as best they can with the rising cost of living, i.e. the same thing as the Nigerian general strike.

We have a curfew every night which is being reduced gradually – from 2 pm on Friday, from 5 on Saturday, and 9 today.

Love to all

Peter

—----------

-

26th Oct '64
10.40 PM

For the last hour thousand upon thousand of excited people have been rushing up and down University Street (which runs past my flat) – walking, cycling, running, riding 12-up on cars and 60-up on lorries, cheering, shouting slogans and generally letting go on a scale which I can only compare to what I remember of VE Day [Victory in Europe, celebrated in Britain] in 1945.

Wonder of wonders, the military government has fallen!

"Long live the people!" go the shouts, "Long live the memory of Ahmed Qurashi!!" (He's the student who was shot dead five days ago).

About an hour and a half ago President Abboud spoke over the radio. He said, roughly, that from the beginning it had not been the intention of the military government to stay in power for ever ….. He was now therefore dissolving the Supreme Council and the Council of Ministers ….. He himself would temporarily retain all powers ….. As soon as possible a popular assembly would be set up which reflected all shades of opinion ….. He begged the people to return to their work and cease destructive acts …..''Long live the Sudan" ….. "Peace be upon you".

It was spoken with true sorrow, sincerity and humility – an act of grace when you think of the loss of face involved, and compare it with the defiant postures of military dictators in every other part of the world. Of course the situation was very far gone, but I feel he may have acted just in time to avoid the reprisals that must have been taken if the affair had been pressed to its bloodiest conclusion.

11 o'clock, and they're still streaming past my flat dressed in jelabias, shirts and trousers, football kit, anything – waving branches, like palms of victory, and shouting for all they're worth.

Tonight there's a mood of unbelieving joy, but tomorrow we'll probably all wake to a week or more of political chaos, as the country adjusts painfully to the practice of responsible democracy for the first time in six years.

And democracy by itself of course won't solve anything. There's still the intractable problem of the South to be dealt with, and the overwhelming economic crisis. They've got about four million in the kitty, which even I know is about enough to pay alone the government officials' salaries for about five months.

The real enemy will be the corruption, sloth and parochialism which toppled the last democratic government. These are the things which will have to be tackled, not least in education, if the country is to maintain stability and initiative.

Anyway it's an event few of us could have believed possible, and I'm very glad to tuck the news of it in with my other letter.

—----------

10th Nov '64

Things are not so violent as the BBC makes out, but we have just passed through 36 hours of great disorder and there is an almighty (political) battle going on for the control of this country among (with various overlaps) 14 political parties, the United National Front, the National Front of Professional Groups, the Communists, the Army, and the Transitional Government.

2 nights ago Radio Omdurman broadcast a report that the army were about to deliver a counter coup. It called on all citizens to defend the capital. So in the middle of the night they poured out into the streets once again, demonstrating loudly, carrying sticks and bottles full of petrol (to take on the tanks!) and proceeded to build barricades round the Palace and the Radio Station, and others blocking the main streets and bridges. During the next morning there was a general strike, demonstrators smashed up the Egyptian Embassy and did some damage to the American Embassy. Ours may have been stoned too. Meanwhile people poured in from the provinces in warlike mood.

By lunchtime it transpired that the original report of the coup was a complete hoax – delivered without authorisation to the Radio Station by an individual who turns out to be a communist lawyer. I think it's woken a lot of people up to the real situation, but all this whipping up of people doesn't make the Govt's task any easier.

Abboud is sitting in the Palace as a powerless President, while his colleagues of the Supreme Council are in El Fasher prison, awaiting a proper trial I hope.

The situation has its moments of humour. As I was walking to the British Council Library yesterday morning, 3 tiny elementary school boys met me, returning from their demonstration. The boldest of them sized me up and then chanted (in Arabic) to his comrades in a high pitched but courageous voice "No American after today!"

But today he'll have to go back to school because everything is quiet again. And so it goes on, with no-one knowing what will happen from one day to the next. One good thing is that there are no police or army around. Yesterday the PM made a superb conciliatory broadcast to the South, which gives the best hope of a solution there has been for years.

6 DECEMBER 1964

"Where were you on the first Sunday of December 1964?" Anyone living in Khartoum at the time can clearly answer that question. A large crowd of Southerners rioted, then fanned out to stone cars and assaulted Northerners through the city. The Northern populace hit back, and a night of violence followed.

It was only a few weeks after the downfall of Abboud's military government. The transitional government had appointed a Southerner, Clement Mboro, as Minister of Interior. This was a sensational move, seeing that a rebel army in the South was making military gains. Clement, who lived in Khartoum, had gone to visit the South to see what could be done to bring peace. Thousands of his Southern people, many of them building workers in the capital, had gathered at the airport to greet him on his return. The plane was delayed by several hours and, as the hot afternoon wore on, a rumour went round that he had been killed by the Northern Army in the South. The crowd went berserk.

That afternoon I had been visiting friends in Khartoum North. It was getting dark and the headlights of my Volkswagen Beetle were on as I approached the Blue Nile Bridge. Suddenly my car and others were surrounded by a mob of Southerners throwing bricks. Two smashed my headlights. Another brick hit the top of the car door six inches behind my head. I jumped out of the passenger door and hid in the home of a teacher I knew until it was safe to drive home.

The British can be foolishly stubborn. On a Sunday I wasn't going to let any rioters stop me going to the Cathedral for the evening service. Peter Oboy, the man I usually sat next to, was four inches taller than me, that is about six foot seven. As I approached the Cathedral, there was Peter stranded in the forecourt. He had come in from the suburbs and found the Cathedral shut. By now Northern vigilantes were hunting Southerners on the streets and some were closing in on him. So I told him to jump into my car. As we drove away, someone hit the bonnet of the car with a heavy stick.

Back home, I closed the window shutters, and we had supper. Outside we could see the vigilantes patrolling Jamia Avenue. I started to prepare the spare bed and told Peter to settle in for the night.

But as we watched and waited he got more and more worried about his folks in Khartoum South. Around ten the street grew quiet and he was insistent on returning. I was uneasy about that. So I suggested we listen for God's guidance and test our motives. This we did. He was of the same mind as before. I still had fears, but we prayed and set off.

Peter, all two metres of him, curled up on the back seat. Central Khartoum was quiet and all went well till we crossed the Hurriya Bridge and proceeded south on the dual carriageway. Too late I saw a crowd of Northerners armed with iron bars who were stopping every vehicle. I had to halt behind a minibus full of people. While that was being searched, I managed to overtake on the left and escape. Having dropped Peter at his home (where he found his people safe), I returned by another route. My car was stopped and searched by more Northern vigilantes on the way.

Next morning at 5.30 a Southern law student knocked at my door. He had felt threatened in the university hostel, and had spent the night hiding in the garden shed of a nearby property. After breakfast in my home, he felt safe to walk back to the university in daylight.

I arrived at the Institute in Omdurman for my eight o'clock lecture. The English Department farrash (messenger and sweeper), a Dongolawi, saw the damage to my car and said, "Shoof ashabak amalou leik kaif - Look how your friends have treated you."

Northerners often assume that the British are biassed towards the South because of the Christian connection. On the other hand, I once spoke in Arabic to a Southerner at Cairo Cathedral and he replied in English, "You have been arabised".

That Khartoum Sunday in December 1964 I had been assaulted by both sides and could claim to be impartial.

In the next few days I visited Clement Mboro and Daoud Abdel Latif in their homes and witnessed their agony at what had happened.

SLAVERY

For hundreds of years the British were energetic slave traders. It was a triangular trade. Ships left British ports like Bristol and Liverpool with goods for West Africa, where they bought slaves from African traders. These were transported in dreadful conditions to the Caribbean islands and the American colonies, and sold in slave markets to plantation owners. The ships returned to British ports with cargoes of sugar from 'the new world'. Other European powers were doing the same in the Caribbean and in America, North and South. The consciousness of pain, guilt, and indifference in regard to slavery still lies uneasily on the British and American conscience. Former centres of the slave trade like Liverpool in England and Richmond in Virginia USA have taken active steps of acknowledgement and restitution.

Some British Christians of the early years opposed slavery. Most condoned it, if only by their silence. In Britain the organised opposition to slavery, when it started in the late 18th century, was led mainly by Christians. And from the slave populations of the Americas, bonded to cruelty, a powerful Christian culture arose, expressed in music that has touched the soul of the world.

As a young Christian, I knew that people of all races have equal dignity. Yet while a National Service soldier, aged 19, in Hong Kong I failed to make close friendships with Chinese people. Secretly I believed the white British had the right to rule other races because we were better and knew best. Later in Ireland my friend the teacher helped me see I was an ordinary sinner in need of the mercy of God. And Britain needed that same mercy for the down side of its nature and history. It was a comic vanity to think we were superior to anyone. But we could be absolutely honest about our past, and join a brotherhood and sisterhood of change and restitution.

Northern Sudanese may feel insulted by the following comparison: historically the Arabs are in many ways similar to the British.

We are both defined by a great religion
We have both ruled a great empire
We are both heirs to a great literature
And we have both been great slave-traders.

A 14-year-old Northern Sudanese schoolboy once told me a story from his grandfather. The old man in his young day had been the rear guard of a line of South Sudanese slaves yoked together for their trek North. The slave at the end escaped, which meant that the guard would be punished. So the guard killed the next man, smeared his blood on the end of the chain, and told the slave master that a lion had killed the last two slaves. I think of that elderly grandfather, perhaps troubled in spirit by memories of his past, and confiding in his schoolboy grandson. Sometimes schoolboys confide in a teacher, even a foreign teacher, if they feel troubled.

It is entirely possible that an ancestor of mine, or any of us white British, carried out an equivalent act of cruelty in a slave-ship on the Atlantic or on a Jamaican sugar plantation.

At the Higher Teacher Training Institute in Omdurman I taught a course on the history of language. There were two Southerners in a lecture room of about twenty-five people. One was Livio Gelego Bahara from Bahr El Ghazal. In all innocence I asked him to explain to us the origin of his names. He replied, “Livio is my Italian Catholic name. Gelego is my tribal name. Bahara is a nickname given me by my grandfather. I was rough with my younger brothers and sisters, and he said I was like the Northern sailors (bahara in Arabic) on the Nile steamers who snatched people.”

I once asked a Khartoum University lecturer if any Arab Sudanese had made a full academic study of slavery. He looked uncomfortable and doubted whether it would ever be done. What a liberating exercise it could be if a group of Muslim historians would undertake this. Perhaps this has happened by now. If so, I should be glad to hear about it.

We all need absolute honesty about our people’s past. Joseph Lagu, of the Madi tribe in South Sudan, told me an oral tradition from his people, when he and I met in London in the 1980s. The Khalifa Abdullahi was ruling Sudan after the death of the Mahdi in 1885. Some time in the 1890s, the Madi tribe sent a delegation to him in Omdurman. They presented him with a number of youths who they had captured from another Southern tribe. Many African peoples, who suffered Arab or European slavery and imperialism, have their own violent history of bondage and racial contempt towards their neighbours. Sometimes they sold their fellow Africans into European slavery.

Lagu was a schoolboy at Rumbek Secondary in 1955 when the Southern Regiment of the Sudan Defence Force mutinied and killed some of their officers. This triggered an orgy of killing in many South Sudanese towns when anyone who looked like an Arab was targeted. Joseph has confessed that as a schoolboy he rejoiced. “I was a racist”. A Northern Sudanese killed in Torit had a wife and three children, one of them Amna aged 3. They fled South towards Uganda, and were given refuge by the elders of Joseph’s tribe. Seventeen years later when General Joseph Lagu made historic peace with the North in 1972, after nine years of civil war, he married Amna who was by now a teacher.

In the riots of 2005 in Khartoum after John Garang’s death, a young Northern Sudanese aged 22, the only son of a widowed mother, was chased by a South Sudanese mob into a house. Once inside he bolted the door. The mob then burned the house down. The young man’s mother could identify him only by something in his pocket. His uncle Dr Mohammed El Murtada Mustafa told me this. More about him later.

I have known brave Sudanese from North and South who look at where they and their people need to be forgiven, instead of just looking at grievances. Lagu and Murtada are two of them.

There is now an international frontier between Sudan and South Sudan. But it is still the same moral and spiritual issue, how these two neighbouring peoples relate to each other. Perhaps we all naturally feel that our own people are basically virtuous and we have suffered aggression from other peoples. Certainly this is the tendency of the British. In the light of absolute honesty, probably all our countries have something to be ashamed of, as well as something to be proud of.

A SOUTHERN POLITICIAN

During my eight years teaching in Sudan I was only able to visit the South twice. Both times there was tension and a heavy security presence, in the build-up to the first civil war. It seemed prudent for a European not to take photos. I had friends, Sudanese and British, among the teachers at Rumbek Secondary School in Bahr El Ghazal Province, and in 1961 I flew to Wau and spent Christmas with them. Isaac Eli was the sports master, a delightful character. I played tennis with him against another British teacher and a Dinka student called Daniel Deng. How do you deal with a man of six foot and ten inches standing on the other side of the net? Answer: you hit the ball as hard as possible at his stomach. We had a lot of fun during those days, and it was wonderful to celebrate Christmas in church with a big crowd of Sudanese. One of the clergy I met in the South was Archdeacon Ezra, a man of devout simplicity who travelled round his large district on a bicycle.

From Rumbek I travelled by lorry along the roads of beaten red earth through Lainya to Juba. The lush vegetation, the streams, and the cattle byres with their long-horned bulls smeared with white ash, were part of an attractive landscape. And the men and women with their straight backs and fearless gaze had a bearing of great dignity.

Two years later teachers from Khartoum Secondary were sent to Wau to invigilate exams in Intermediate schools, because the teachers there were on strike. I managed to visit Rumbek again but, as in Wau, there was an even greater sense of suspicion between North and South. Boys from Rumbek were beginning to travel secretly to the rebel army assembling in Uganda. I paid a courtesy call on the Governor of Bahr El Ghazal, Allam Hassan Allam, who was polite but guarded. Throughout my short visit I was closely watched by security. Sudan's military government suspected the British of inciting the South to rebel against the Muslim and Arab North. It was not long before the brutal civil war began in earnest, and no further travel from the North was possible for several years.

But all through those years there was a large presence of South Sudanese in Khartoum, among the student body of the university, labourers on building sites and their families in the outer suburbs, along with a number of administrators and politicians. One of the politicians was Buth Diu, a former Member of Parliament, and in 1958 Minister of Works in the Government of Prime Minister Abdulla Khalil. I had already met him at a conference in Switzerland that summer, two months before I came to Sudan.

Buth Diu was a Nuer from Upper Nile Province who never went to school. He started work as a servant in the house of the British District Commissioner of Fanjak. One of his jobs was to clean the DC's shoes. He learned to speak English well and won the prized job of interpreter for the DC. Then he taught himself to read and write, and typed the constitution of a political party he had founded.

He was one of the representatives of the South at the Juba Conference of 1947. The Southerners agreed to remain part of Sudan, on the promise of a federal system. The breaking of that promise was a cause of division. As Independence approached, the DC said to Buth Diu, "You can either take over my job or go into Parliament".

The Northern Sudanese have a saying 'Nuer jambak, nar jambak - a Nuer next door is a fire next door'. While Buth was friendly with a few Northerners, he had a fiery hatred of

Northern attitudes. In Parliament he once declared that he would rather commit suicide than be identified as a Northern Sudanese. He quickly became the leader of the Southern bloc in Parliament. Northern politicians who wanted the Southern vote would give him money. To ensure solidarity he would take the Southern MPs on a tour of the bars of Khartoum. In the papers next morning there were pictures of drunken politicians and crashed cars.

In 1958 when Buth was a Minister he saw a film called Freedom written by Africans and shot in Nigeria. With colour and humour it depicted colonial arrogance and African factionalism. It showed how politicians often neglected their wives and children. It suggested there was a meeting point under God's guidance where all could experience a change of heart. A hate-free, fear-free, greed-free Africa would have much to offer the world. Buth felt challenged

That summer the Prime Minister asked him, with another Southerner, Joshua Malwal Mut, a Shilluk Member of Parliament from Bentiu in Upper Nile, and two Northerners, to represent Sudan at the Moral Re-Armament Assembly in Caux, Switzerland. The Northerners were Mohammed Salih Shangitti, Speaker of Parliament, and Daoud Abdel Latif, Governor of Kassala Province. Caux is three thousand feet above Lake Geneva. On a fine day it commands a view of the lake, the valley of the River Rhone, and the mountains beyond. The day the Sudanese arrived the whole place was in cloud and everybody was indoors. Buth insisted on going out into the garden and I went with him. I can still picture this giant figure from the hot dry plains of Africa, sitting on a bench and laughing as the chill mist swirled around him.

He shared a room with David Hind, one of those who had brought the film Freedom to Sudan. Remembering his first job, Buth was amazed when this Englishman cleaned his shoes and served him in other ways. Years later he told me, "I knew MRA must be a revolution if it could achieve that with the British." He had long talks with other African delegates from Nigeria and Southern Africa, some of whom had written or played in the film. He started to examine his personal life and political outlook.

Alcohol had bonded him with the Southern MPs. Excess had degraded their cause. His wife and children had suffered from neglect. He decided to give up alcohol completely, and to review his domineering attitude towards Southern politicians from smaller tribes. One day in front of five hundred people at a plenary session of the assembly, he apologised to the Arab Northern Sudanese for his hatred.

How would that work out at home? Two months after his return to Sudan, the Army took power in November 1958. Party politics were banned and Buth was out of a job. He was often short of money, and the decision to quit alcohol was of financial importance. He delighted in time spent at home with his family. He had two daughters, Teresa and Mary. His eldest son Winder was named after the last British Governor of Upper Nile. The next, Churchill, was known as Charles. The third, Commonwealth, was later re-named John. Then John became a Muslim and adopted the name Saif El Din. Buth named the fourth boy Paul after the Canadian doctor in Caux, Paul Campbell, who had helped him give up alcohol and bitterness. The fifth son was called Shangitti after the former Speaker of Parliament who was a kind friend.

More and more people, Northerners and Southerners, wanted to visit Buth and find out about his new attitudes. He was keen for them to see Freedom and other films. This was my moment to buy a 16mm film projector, using the money I had offered two years before as a cut in my salary. I also bought two copies of Freedom, one in Arabic, one in English, and a feature film called The Crowning Experience. This told the story of a woman born into slavery in USA, who became one of the country's great reconcilers. Nearly every week there was a film show in Buth's garden after dark and I was the projectionist. University students came and his children's school friends, as well as people senior in the life of the country. When the military government fell, and democracy returned, Buth Diu was appointed Minister for Animal Resources in 1965.

The spiritual struggle continued in his life, as it does for us all. An Arab Sudanese insulted him in Khartoum, and the old temptation to hate welled up in him. "I wish bitterness was something you could see like a dog," he said to me, "so you could shoot it and it wouldn't exist any more".

One evening he was invited to dinner by a British diplomat who had served in the South as a District Commissioner before independence, and had known him in his young days. Buth asked me to come with him for moral support. Before the meal the diplomat offered him beer, gin and whiskey, During the meal there were various wines, and after the meal brandy and more whiskey. Buth turned them all down and drank only fruit juice and water throughout the evening.

How insensitive we British can be to people's real needs. From my cultural viewpoint, there is no problem about people drinking and serving alcohol in moderation, although I do not take it myself. For Buth as a reformed alcoholic, it was vital not to touch a drop. Vital too for his family and for the statesmanship he still had to offer.

Dinner at the home of Buth Diu, Minister of Animal Resouces. At the table from left. Stanislaus, Member of Parliament for Raja;
Hassan Awadullah, Minister of Education; Rajmohan Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi; Clement Mboro, recent Minister of Interior.

Buth Diu

Paul Buth Diu

Sudan Government delegation at the MRA Caux Conference, Switzerland. L-R Buth Diu, Minister of Works;
Mohammed Salih Shangitti, Speaker of Parliament; Joshua Malwal Mut, Member of Parliament for Bentiu;
Daud Abdel Latif, Governor of Kassala Province.

A NORTHERN CIVIL SERVANT

One of the Northern Sudanese who became a good friend to Buth Diu was Mohammed El Murtada Mustafa. He had just graduated from the University of Addis Ababa, receiving his degree from the hands of Emperor Haile Selassie. A few years later he gained a PhD in Economics at North-East University in Boston USA. In Ethiopia Murtada heard about the idea of Moral Re-Armament with its emphasis on "not who is right but what is right". A devout Muslim, he took this concept into his career in the Ministry of Labour. In the years to come, countless industrial disputes would be resolved on the basis of "what is right" and he was greatly trusted by the trade unions. In the mid-1970s he became the Director of the Ministry. After a few years he was Dean of the Civil Service, leader of the 17 directors of ministries. In the late 1980s the International Labour Office appointed him head of their African trade union training centre in Zimbabwe, and then ILO Representative for North Africa in Cairo.

As a young graduate, he had long talks with Buth Diu, and through him lived into the cultural memories of South Sudan. In his own soul Murtada faced the cost of the change that would be needed if North and South were ever to live in harmony.

The trend of those times was apparently against Buth and Murtada and their circle of friends. Military government continued. It stifled public debate in the North and provoked further rebellion in the South. One of my own students, Zuhair Bayoumi, joined the Army after leaving Khartoum Secondary School and was killed in the South.

The fall of the military government in 1964 opened the way for other peacemakers in the North. Daoud Abdel Latif was one of the initiators of a Round Table conference in Khartoum in 1965. Some of the Southern leaders flew in from Ethiopia and East Africa for open discussions in the new climate of free speech. I invited one of them to a private lunch in my flat with a North Sudanese friend. It was a failure. I had underestimated the degree of personal trust that needs to be established before political issues can be resolved. This seemed to be true of the Round Table discussions as a whole.

Students and politicians from North and South continued flocking to Buth Diu's home. One of them was a law student called Achol Deng. Many years later, when he was Ambassador to the Netherlands, he stated that MRA had helped lay the groundwork of trust in Khartoum on which peace could be built. But in 1966 that peace still looked remote.

The war dragged on for another five years. Murtada maintained his close friendship with Buth Diu. One evening in 1971, knowing that there were peace negotiations afoot, they met to talk. Buth was building a new house and there was no electricity as yet. The two friends sat on the flat roof of the unfinished first floor. Murtada later wrote about that evening:

"We talked for some time as we often did about the war and possible solutions. Then we fell silent. Buth said he had some ideas which he asked me to write down. We drafted a memo by the light of a candle. Next morning he submitted it to the Minister of Interior who accepted it with great suspicion. But a year later the main points of the memo appeared as the main principles of the North-South agreement.

"In the following years it was my task to draft a national strategy for social and economic development. I allocated a special chapter to the South as I believed we Northerners did not only have to ask them to forget the past, but had to sacrifice to make practical restitution.

"Of course many other people contributed to North-South reconciliation at that time. Many more are needed to sustain it. But I learned from Buth Diu's example that the settling of problems does not depend primarily on technicalities or formal approaches. Basic solutions come from a cure to the weaknesses of human nature – pride, fear, hatred and suspicion. These can be replaced by forgiveness, love, and common targets for the well-being of a nation, as individuals find courage to obey God's guidance.

"Twenty years ago when I was a Pan-African Scholar at the University of Addis Ababa I saw poverty and corruption around me. It was then that I met Moral Re-Armament. 'People first' became the essence of my ideology. I learned that man matters for himself. He is a spiritual, not just an economic being.

"Some of us graduates decided early on to accept the discipline involved in giving this sort of leadership. It has meant certain simple decisions such as punctuality in the office and finishing the work in hand, and taking leave only when I feel the office can spare me. I chase up bills in my department rather than accept the corruption implied in delay or non-presentation."

The Anya-Nya leader Joseph Lagu signed the Addis Ababa Peace Accord in 1972 with President Numeiri's representative, and returned to a hero's welcome in Khartoum by the population. He was promoted to Lieutenant-General and made Chief Inspector of all Sudan's armed forces. He spent the next years integrating his Southern troops into the national army, police and civilian work. He was then elected Chairman of the South Sudan Authority. Sudan was to enjoy eleven years of reconciliation and development.

Dr Mohammed El Murtada Mustafa, Director of the Sudan Ministry of Labour

Buth Diu died in 1975. His eldest son Winder responded to a letter of sympathy from Britain, “Dear Old Buth as you have rightly put it died a happy death because his God-guided efforts towards the Southern settlement were achieved and implemented during his lifetime. At least he left a united Sudan. Stability, equality, justice and peace were the objectives of his lifetime struggle. He was buried here in Khartoum in the Commonwealth Cemetery where the Sudanese, Northerners and Southerners, paid their last tributes. Together they mourned and carried and laid him to his final rest.”

Murtada was one of those who made the funeral arrangements. He wrote fully about Buth in the Arabic press, and continued to care for his family. Forty years later he still speaks of him with respect and affection.

Murtada and his wife Mona have been generous friends to me. In most of my 25 return visits to Sudan since completing my teaching there, I have stayed in their home, sometimes accompanied by my wife Jean and son John. They and other members of their family have often stayed in our home in London. We attended the wedding of their daughter Hanim in Omdurman in 2001. When John was married in 2008, Hanim, by then a mother of three in California where her husband works, made the long journey to London to represent the family. When my wife and I thanked her, she said, “My brother. I had to come.”

A SOCIALIST REVOLUTIONARY

Sirr Anai was the most combative person I have ever known. A Dinka from Bahr El Ghazal in the South, he carried the scars of initiation on his forehead. The custom was that, when a youth came to manhood, he lay on his back and six parallel cuts were made on his forehead from ear to ear, to ensure that he would never be afraid of anyone or anything. Sirr was born into a Muslim family, attended a Christian intermediate school, and adopted the ideas of a socialist revolutionary. In 1964, as war in the South intensified, his secondary school Rumbek was moved to Khartoum, sharing some of the buildings of Khartoum Secondary. It was there that he came up to talk to me, or rather shout at me, after I had shown the film 'Freedom' one evening.

'Freedom' is the story of an African country approaching independence in a state of tension between political factions, traditional rulers and the representative of 'Imperia'. Some of the characters find change in their personal lives, and make peace with political foes, rescuing the country from violence. Sirr considered forgiveness as betrayal of the struggle. Later I learned his first instinct had been to smash the projector. I responded as best I could, only to meet another torrent of anger. Finally I said if he wasn't interested in the message of the film, that didn't bother me; I had teaching preparation to do at home, but if he wanted to talk another time, this was my address.

He came to my home next evening, and every evening for a week. As an Englishman from a quiet, secure village, how could I get on the wavelength of a South Sudanese radical? Like many of his people in the South he had a disaster story to make the angels weep. He hated the Northern Sudanese both personally and as a political culture.

When I had been Sirr's age as a student in UK, I could not think of anyone I hated. Then my mind went back to my time as a young National Service soldier in Hong Kong. A major shouted at me in front of other soldiers on an issue where I was in the right. When I tried to explain, he swore at me and threatened to put me on a charge. All I could do was salute and turn away in silence. In the Army you have to take the rough with the smooth. But as I lay on my bed that night I hated this man, and imagined myself setting about him and his family with a hatchet. Among my fellow soldiers I took every chance to assassinate his character.

Someone said that if the other person is ninety per cent wrong, and you are only ten per cent wrong, it is easier for you to start putting right your bit. A year later at Cambridge as I thought about the major, I knew I had been wholly wrong as a Christian to react that way. I wrote to him in Hong Kong and apologised for my hatred. Posting that letter I felt liberated, even though no reply came.

A year later I went to the Caux conference in Switzerland and met German students, sons and daughters of people who had suffered for their opposition to Hitler. I realised I had hate and contempt for all Germans, as an English boy who had grown up in World War Two. I apologised to one of the German students for self-righteousness. Next day he apologised to me. We sensed we had a part in building a new Europe where old wounds would be healed.

These personal experiences seemed very small compared with the convulsion of civil war in South Sudan, and what Sirr's family had suffered. Yet as we talked he came to see that personal hatred was a handicap to a revolutionary struggling for a just society. Nor did it accord with faith, whether Muslim or Christian. We talked about the lives of other people who had struggled for justice without bitterness in their countries, Gandhi for instance. Godwin Lewanika, an African patriot in Northern Rhodesia (later Zambia), had talked about liberation from personal hate in these terms: "This does not mean that a man stops fighting for what he believes is right. On the contrary, he fights harder. But he fights with clean hands and a pure heart."

Sirr brought many of his Southern friends to my home to talk and see other films that illustrated the theme of reconciliation. We had times of silence to pray for God's guidance. As they started to look at their own faults, these students came to see the Northern Sudanese as human beings with their own needs. Perhaps it was their responsibility to build a new relationship of trust between North and South. They started to bring new friends from among the Northern students, and often there would be larger gatherings in the garden of Buth Diu.

Sirr was greatly impressed with Dr Murtada and other senior Northerners who treated Southerners with an equality of respect. He also enjoyed meeting Gandhi's grandson Rajmohan who was visiting Sudan. Rajmohan Gandhi had launched a campaign for the moral and spiritual renewal of India. A conference centre at Panchgani in West India had opened to give training. He also edited a weekly news magazine called Himmat (Determination) in Bombay with the same purpose. Sirr asked if he could come for training in this kind of journalism. After he left school, Murtada helped him to travel to India where he spent a year.

Sirr remained a turbulent character throughout his life, but with a compassion for people and a great sense of humour. As a journalist he was often publicly critical of the Khartoum Government. During the 1970's a regional Southern Government ran the South from Juba. Sirr attacked them too when he felt necessary. In both places he often had his paper shut down, and sometimes he was imprisoned for short periods. During one spell of interrogation, his nose was broken with a pistol butt. On this occasion, because of Sirr's refusal to hate, the man apologised and offered financial compensation.

Here is an article dated Thursday 25 May 1978 he wrote in The Nile Mirror in Juba when he was Editor:

As I am, so is my country

If I give promises which I cannot fulfil, I am then a liar. And if there are so many people who give promises they cannot keep, and who happen to be occupying top decision-making positions in the country, the result is dreadful, a country where people lie!

If I am corrupt, and there are so many others who are also corrupt at the helm of the country's affairs, the country is obviously a corrupt country. If I am lazy and do not finish my day's work in the office, production will slow down. Multiply this, and you will have a country which will always remain as one of the poorest nations of the world, etc.

Can we relate this to what is happening in our country today? Do we have among ourselves people who never keep their promises? Are there among us those who are not straight in their dealings

with their subordinates or bosses? Are there some of us in high positions who are not honest in handling public funds? Do some of us earn high salaries for doing very little or nothing in return? To be honest, I cannot point my finger very far. If I claim, as I do, to be a revolutionary, I must first blame myself.

There are instances when I have totally neglected my full day's work in my office. When I am asked why, I am quick to give the flimsiest excuses. But at the end of the month I see to it that I receive my full salary! This is of course a theft, as President of the High Executive Council Sayed Joseph Lagu pointed out in a speech recently. It is too bad, isn't it? And yet I dare to call myself a revolutionary.

Also, I have failed on several occasions to keep my promises and appointments. Yet I am always the first to blame others when they do the same! There is no doubt this is hypocrisy. If this is repeated on a national scale, what do you think the national character would be? It would no doubt be the sum total of the character of its citizens.

But why do I have to say all these things? Why not? How do we intend to celebrate the 9th anniversary of the May Revolution? Is it not by humble and honest renewal of our commitment to the service of mother Sudan?

By exposing our weaknesses we can have a clear vision of the new society we want to create. We could become an example of the new type of leadership we would like to see running both public and private affairs in the Sudan. Is this an idle dream? Not if we decide to change drastically and revolutionise ourselves.

As far as I am concerned, I have decided to celebrate this great occasion by humbly revealing my weaknesses. I also ask those who have been hurt by my misconduct to forgive me. And may the Almighty God help me to rise above my iniquities and become the socialist revolutionary I was meant to be.

Some religious men may be unhappy for having asked God to make me a socialist revolutionary. But is God a monopoly of non-socialists? Does God condone social injustices and corruption? Does he approve of oppression and exploitation of man by man?"

While Sirr was working in Khartoum in the 1980's, his wife and children were trapped in Bahr El Ghazal by the second civil war. Later they managed to travel to Khartoum. But by that time Sirr was on a postgraduate course in London and for political reasons could not return to Khartoum. On one of my return visits to Sudan I took a letter from him to his wife. I came back with a message of peace from her, drawings by his artist son, and photos of the family. But Sirr was never to see them again. He caught chicken pox in London and suddenly died of a brain haemorrhage.

In 1993 he wrote this prayer:

"…Merciful God, you know we cannot always be courageous and strong in body and spirit. You know that sometimes we feel weak and fearful of the world around us. Sometimes I feel like that, dear God, and yet I know that is not the way a servant of yours should feel. …Please, my God, ….. give me the kind of light which comes from being a sincere believer. I want the kind of light that others will see what a change you have made in me. I want to bring others to you to receive the same. Most Gracious God, even as I have prayed, I have felt your peace entering my spirit. Your spirit has lifted me up so high that I feel I can go forth once more with courage, confidence and joy, and full of your light and love for all my brothers and sisters, regardless of differences in race, tribe, religion and opinion. Lord, hear my prayer."

Sirr Anai (left) with Mesfun Hailu from Eritrea at Asia Plateau conference centre in Panchgani, India.

HARAMBEE AFRICA

In July 1966 Sirr Anai and his friends provided the core of a group of young North and South Sudanese who welcomed 'Harambee Africa' at Khartoum Airport. Sharhabeel, Sudan's leading jazz musician, was there with his band leading them in the singing of an Arabic version of the show's main song 'Up with people' and a song he had composed called 'Marhab (welcome) Harambee'.

Harambee (Let's pull together) was a concept launched by Jomo Kenyatta at the time of his country's independence. There had been years of violent confrontation with the white settlers and the colonial government, and also a rivalry between some of the tribes of Kenya. Kenyatta himself, one of Africa's veteran nationalists, had been through different stages of political thought. One phase of Kenya's national struggle was the violent Mau-Mau insurgency, countered violently by the British, who were always trying to pin the blame on Kenyatta. During a period of detention he had seen the African film 'Freedom' and felt it had a vital message for Kenya. He also met white settlers who apologised for the selfish and domineering way they had lived. He asked for the film to be translated into Swahili and shown widely round the country in the run-up to independence. A group of former Mau-Mau fighters and white farmers undertook this task together, aided by young people from Canada and Britain who came in to help without salary. In cinemas, stadiums and market places the film was shown to 700,000 people over a period of several years. It was credited with contributing to a stable environment when Independence came.

In 1963 I spent my annual leave in Kenya assisting with this programme. With a young Canadian I went to the port of Mombasa to collect a cinema truck which had been donated by British people in Moral Re-Armament. It had a hooded screen at the rear which enabled films to be shown in daylight in market places.

As a fruit of this campaign, an international conference was held in 1965 in Nairobi attended by Sudanese and people from other African countries. The idea was born of a musical show called Harambee Africa. It would dramatise the moral and spiritual values that Africa wanted to be known for in the world. A group of young Kenyans, Ugandans, Tanzanians and others, with the help of a professional director, started to write and rehearse the show. and there were successful showings of it in East Africa. Young Sudanese who had been at the conference, and were following news of the show, wanted it to come to Sudan and asked me to help. I stayed the four months of my final leave in Sudan doing this.

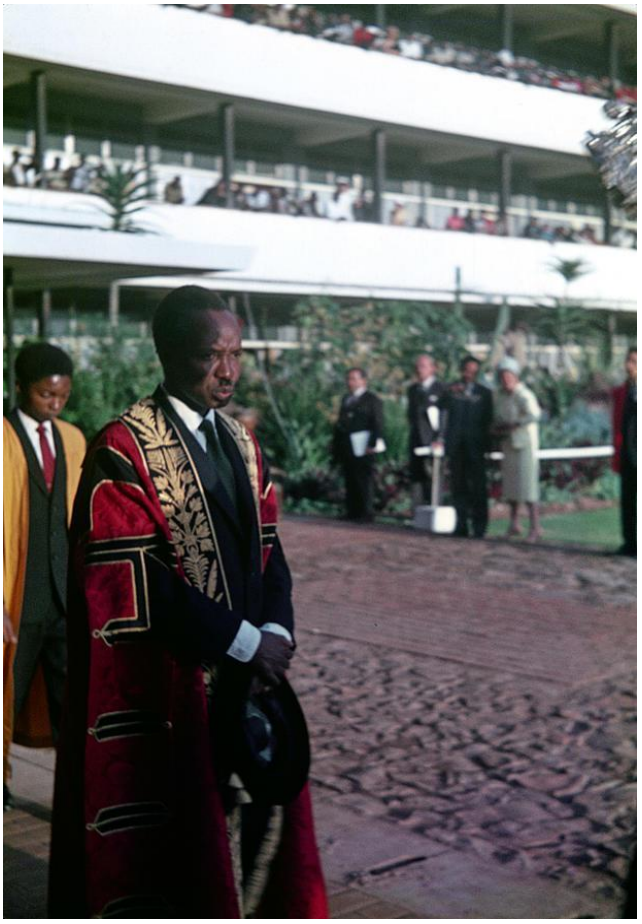
Buth Diu invited the Sudan Minister of Education, Hassan Awadalla, and others to his Khartoum home to discuss this movement. As a result, the company of Harambee Africa, 70 people in all, were invited to Sudan as Government guests for two weeks in July 1966. Transport from and to Nairobi was gifed by Sudan Airways. President Ismail Azhari received the group in the Republican Palace, and presented them with a silver shield. Imam El Hadi El Mahdi invited all seventy of them to breakfast in his Khartoum palace. The Catholic and Anglican Bishops in Khartoum gave their blessing to the enterprise.

Sadiq El Mahdi, Prime Minister at the age of thirty, entertained them on a two-hour cruise on the Nile. He said, "I hope you will carry 'Harambee' throughout the continent. It is the spirit we need today for this generation and for generations to come." Two thousand

students attended an open-air showing in Khartoum University, and Sudan Railways hosted a performance in the Atbara football stadium. From Sudan the show went to Addis Ababa by invitation of the Ethiopian Government, before being flown back to Nairobi by Sudan Airways.

My eight years with the Ministry of Education came to an end at that time, so I cannot assess the long term effect of Harambee Africa in Sudan. My impression is that, in a period of civil war and ideological ferment, it provided a joyous vision of what Africans could accomplish together. While that vision remains to be implemented in its fullness, 'Harambee Africa' is still an encouraging memory for those who experienced it.

Africa Hall, Addis Ababa, HQ of the OAU



President Nyerere of Tanzania in Nairobi 1963 as Chancellor of the new University of East Africa

Jomo Kenyatta as new Prime Minister of Kenya at a rally in Nakuru

Harambee Africa at Khartoum University

President of the Supreme Council Ismail El Azhari Josphat Muigai from Kenya, member of Harambee Africa

Prime Minister Sadiq El Mahdi talks with Harambee Africa members,
Richard Baraza from Kenya (right) and Andrew Peppetta from South Africa.

THE MAHDI'S TOMB

In the 1960s as you looked from Khartoum across the confluence of the Blue and White Niles to Omdurman, a silver dome shone on the horizon. The Mahdi's Tomb, built after Mohammed Ahmed El Mahdi's death in 1885, is not the one we see today. That one was destroyed by British artillery after the defeat of the Mahdist Army at the Battle of Kerreri (or Omdurman, as the British call the battle) on September 2nd 1898. The aim of Kitchener, the British commander, was to obliterate the legend of the Mahdi. So he instructed his river steamers to moor by the west bank of the main Nile and bombard the Tomb. One of the first shells fell wide and killed the correspondent of The Times newspaper. To this day a plaque in English remains on a nearby wall, recording that "Hubert Howard Fell Here". Under further shelling the large dome collapsed. Kitchener ordered the grave of the Mahdi to be desecrated and the bones thrown in the river. Then the soldiers were left free to loot the fittings.

For the next 49 years, the tomb was left as a fenced-off ruin in the heart of Omdurman until the Mahdi's surviving son Abdel Rahman was allowed to rebuild. With permission from the family you can enter the Tomb today, yes, even if you are British. Palm trees in a sandy courtyard give little shade from the fierce sun. As you take off your shoes and step into the shrine, it is like the peace and coolness of a cathedral. Arabic inscriptions on a canopy of polished mahogany mark the graves of the Mahdi, his son Abdel Rahman, and his two eldest grandsons Siddiq and El Hadi. The walls are decked with banners of the Mahdist armies, embroidered with the creed of Islam: "There is no god but God and Mohammed is the Prophet of God," with the added claim "Mohammed El Mahdi is the Successor of the Prophet of God." Around the shrine are glass cabinets with objects from the old tomb recovered by the family, including a carved and gilded piece of wood, part of the surround of the original grave.

In 1960 I got word from MRA friends in Britain that a retired Scottish soldier, Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Edward Stevenson, wanted to return some items to the Mahdi family. His late father General Sir William Peyton had been at the Battle of Omdurman and returned home with these items from the battlefield and the tomb. One was that ornamental piece of wood from inside the tomb. There was also an Emir's battle standard and a soldier's tunic (jibba). The Imam Siddiq El Mahdi invited me to a dinner where I formally handed over the objects "in the spirit of restitution".

An article in 'The Morning News', Khartoum's English language paper, on December 22 recorded Imam Siddiq's words: "The whole Mahdi family, visitors to the tomb and the entire country will be grateful for this. We all regret the mistakes of the past, but we are very glad when they can be put right like this, because our desire is for friendship. I want you to know how much we appreciate this."

Two or three years later I was on leave in my village Radlett, 15 miles North-West of London. An old lady, Mrs Hutchinson, friend of our family, greeted me as I came out of church one Sunday. When she learned I was still working in Sudan, she amazed me by saying, "In my house we have a Quran stolen from the Mahdi's Tomb."

Next day I was invited to see it. In fact it was a tafseer, a theological commentary on the Quran. Inside was a piece of paper certifying that it had been taken from the Mahdi's

Tomb in September 1898, and a few years later sold by a Sergeant-Major to a British officer at the Gezira Club in Cairo. Mrs Hutchinson's husband, himself a soldier in Egypt, had bought it some years later. He was long dead and she did not know the significance of the book.

I was able to tell her that many of the Mahdi followers at the start of the twentieth century wanted their revenge on the British. But their young leader Abdel Rahman, last surviving son of El Mahdi, had instead opted for the modernisation of his country, in agriculture and education, on the route to independence. This had led him to support Britain in two world wars. He had also seen an integrity in many of the British officials that he equated with the precepts of Islam.

Mrs Hutchinson said, "I have always felt that book does not belong to me." The question was to whom she should hand it over. By this time Siddiq El Mahdi had died and been succeeded as leader by his brother El Hadi. It happened that the third brother Yahya, an Oxford graduate, was doing some research in the University of London. One day he came to Radlett, and on behalf of his family received the book from Mrs Hutchinson. We had lunch afterwards in my parents' home.

Kerreri battlefield

Mahdi's tomb, Omdurman

Yahya El Mahdi receiving the Quran commentary from Mrs Hutchinson at her home in Radlett, UK

COMMANDER OF THE ANSAR YOUTH

Relationships in the Mahdi family, with their intermarriages, are as complicated as the royal families of Europe. The politics of their Umma Party are equally difficult for a foreigner to understand. I never attempted a study of either. But the return of these looted objects brought deeper friendship with some of the family.

Yahya's younger brother Ahmed was also at Oxford University. While enjoying life there, he was invited by an Australian friend to a Moral Re-Armament conference for young people in America. He had talks with the initiator of MRA Frank Buchman. Mahdi means guided or inspired (by God) and Buchman urged him to become a statesman of that kind.

Several times during the years I taught in Sudan Ahmed won praise for that quality. On one occasion in 1961 he took action which prevented a civil war starting.

Moulid El Nabi, the Prophet Mohammed's Birthday, is one of the most colourful festivals in Sudan. For the three-day event, the great square before the Mahdi's Tomb in Omdurman was shared out among the main Muslim groupings. Each put up a decorated awning, and provided chairs and cold drinks for their followers and guests. In between were brightly lit booths selling pink candy. Thousands of citizens, mostly in families, milled around the square enjoying a night out. Similar events took place at a central point in both Khartoum and Khartoum North. Ahmed El Mahdi, as commander of the youth wing of the Ansar (Mahdi followers), was expected to visit all three sites.

By 1961 the Military Government and the Ansar were far apart. At the Moulid in Omdurman a large armed police contingent arrived. A bloody clash took place and three Ansar were killed. As the crowds fled in panic, the police took up position in a ditch at the edge of the square and continued their rifle fire. The Ansar ran to their awning and broke up the furniture. At this moment Ahmed El Mahdi arrived, and walked through the police line of fire without knowing what was going on.

He had planned to visit Khartoum North first, but an inner prompting sent him direct to the Omdurman Moulid. Once there he was surrounded by his followers brandishing daggers and chair legs, and calling on him to lead them into battle. He told me a few days later that if he had known the full scale of police aggression he might have given a different order. But the Ansar obeyed his command to disperse peacefully, with the assurance that the government would be held to account in other ways.

It could have been a massacre with terrible consequences. For every Ansar killed in Khartoum, there were probably a thousand in western Sudan ready to march on the capital. The Government acknowledged it had been in the wrong and thanked Ahmed El Mahdi for averting what could have turned into civil war. A period of more respectful relations followed.

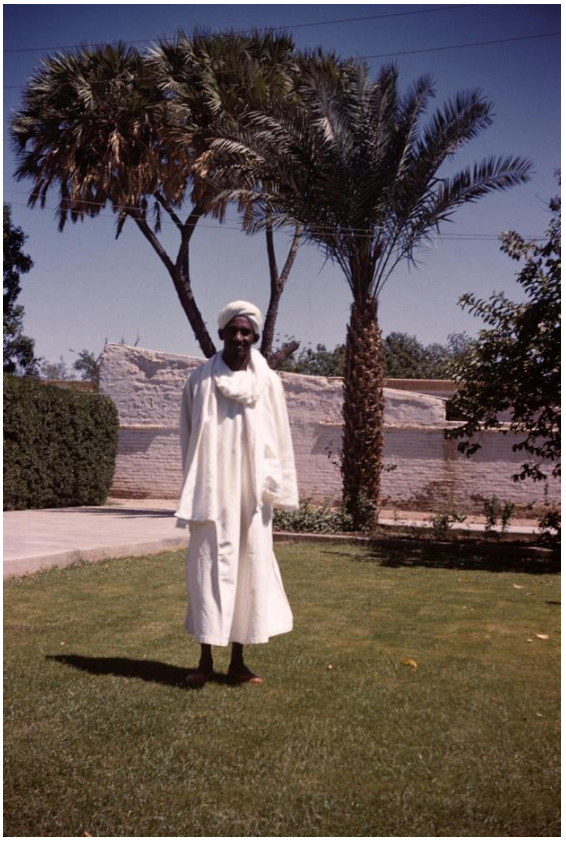
I often visited Ahmed El Mahdi in his home and learned a lot from him about the spiritual qualities that Muslims aspire to. We had candid conversations. He read my character as an activist, who tends to rush about doing things and meeting people, and often lacks a clear focus. He taught me about an-nafs al-mutma'inna, the settled spirit we should cultivate, rather than the restless spirit.

I was familiar with this from the Psalmist who wrote, “My heart is fixed.” But it was a Muslim who recalled me to my truth, by referring to his truth. As Muslims and Christians, we have important differences. We also share important truths, for instance the “fruit of the Spirit” as listed in the New Testament: love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and self-control. Muslim parents at their best try to bring up children with these qualities, as do Christians at their best. We can help each other live these truths, by reference to the One God we both serve. We can also be honest about where we fail. “Compete with each other in good works” is the Islamic teaching. I have had a cheerful comradeship of this kind with Ahmed over the years.

In his younger day Ahmed could not always recall the precise quotation from the Quran he was searching for. In this case he would call out “Ya walad - Boy!” An ancient Ansar servant from West Sudan, Feki Adam Mansour, would emerge from the shadows and provide the exact text. Often on a Friday morning, while waiting in an outer room to see Ahmed, I would have long conversations in basic Arabic with Feki Adam. A delightful character, warm and wise.

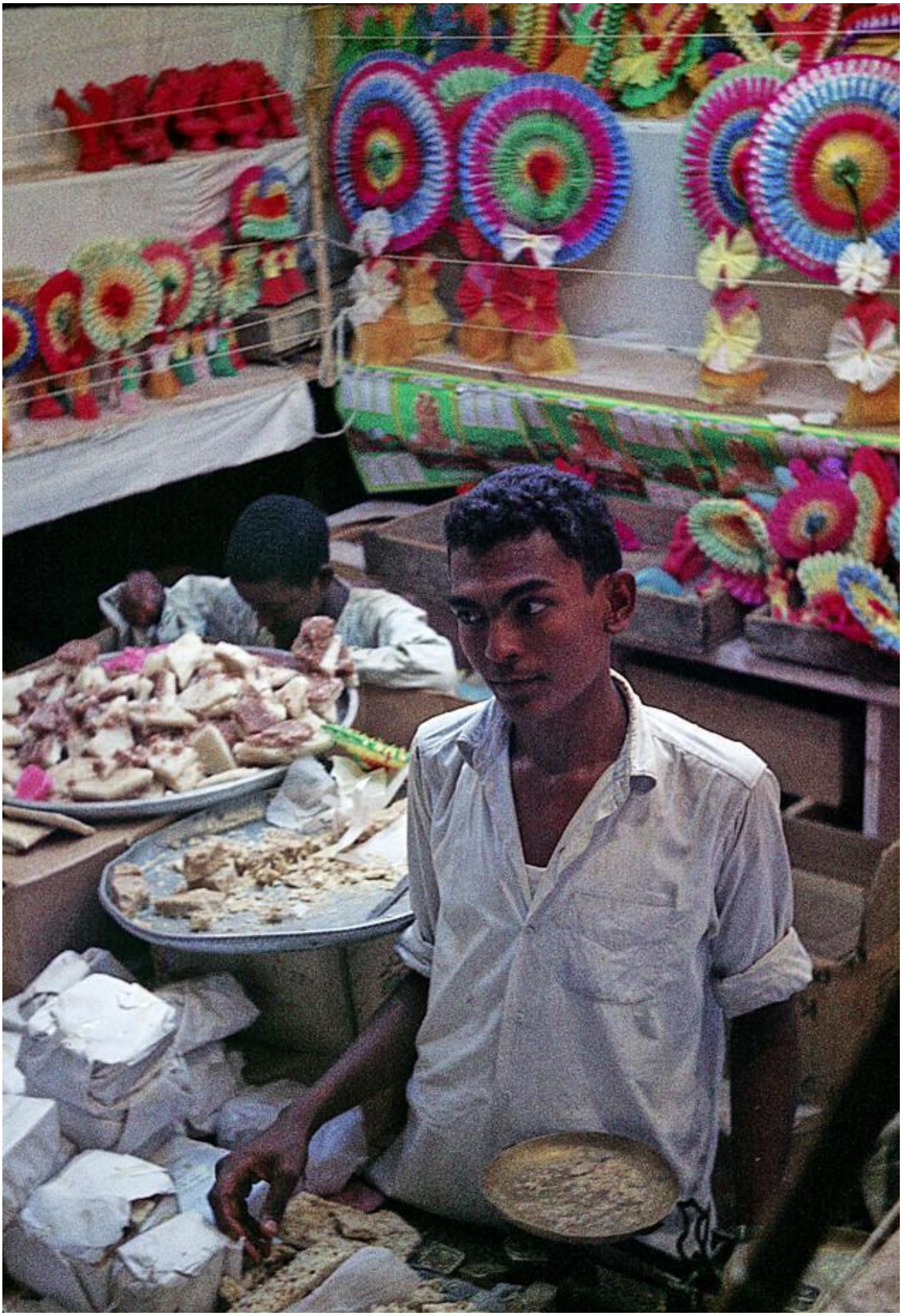
The Ansar had a militant tradition, and considered themselves the rightful rulers of Sudan. A proportion of them were illiterate. As Independence approached, they had to be taught there was a route to power called an election, and everyone had to mark a ballot paper. Ahmed told me that soon afterwards a large crowd of Ansar were heard chanting in procession “Imma bil waraqa imma bissaif - Either by the paper or by the sword!”

One evening Ahmed el Mahdi asked me to an occasion at his home when he was entertaining the senior Umma politician Mohammed Ahmed Mahjoub. As Foreign Minister of Sudan in 1958 Mahjoub was well known in the Arab League and at the United Nations in New York. He was a distinguished lawyer who also published several books of poetry. I had briefly met him in his chambers, while visiting Rashid El Tahir and Dafallah Haj Yousif, who were junior lawyers there. Following the Sudan's six years of military government, he was back as Foreign Minister, since the Umma Party had won the 1965 election. It was fascinating to listen to his conversation with Ahmed. I was impressed that this giant intellect (in both Arab and western cultures) would heed the views of a religious leader half his age.



Ahmed El Mahdi

Huda Ahmed El Mahdi



Prophet's Birthday celebration (Moulid) in Omdurman. A sweet stall manned by Abu Bakr Siddiq, Port Sudan Secondary pupil

IMAM EL HADI

Imam Siddiq El Mahdi was an artful politician, highly trained for leadership. It was a great shock when he died suddenly in 1961 after only two years as Imam. His next brother El Hadi by contrast was large of heart and slow of speech, more at home with farmers than politicians. I compare him to George the Sixth in UK, a shy man with a bad stammer, who had to become King in 1936 when his elder brother Edward the Eighth abdicated. For El Hadi there was also a rivalry with Siddiq's son Sadik, an Oxford graduate and an aspiring leader.

In January 1966 I was one of El Hadi's guests at the Id after Ramadan in Aba. Aba is a long island in the White Nile North of Kosti, famous as the place where Mohammed Ahmed Abdullah meditated for long years in a cave before proclaiming his mission as the Mahdi. It remains the spiritual centre of the Ansar. During that Id about a quarter of a million people came in from western Sudan to pray, and to reaffirm their allegiance to the Imam.

One day El Hadi spoke to a few of us guests about the divisions in the family and the country. He concluded that the solution was for him to become President of Sudan. I listened with respect but was troubled. In my time of quiet next morning it was clear to me that the Presidency was not El Hadi's role. His calling was rather to be a spiritual father to his nation, North and South, and to leave the political management to others.

Later that morning I said good-bye, but held back from sharing my thought with him. I was his guest, younger and junior and a foreigner, and surely it was none of my business.

That year I left Sudan. The divisions among the democratic politicians continued, and the civil war remained unsolved, opening the way for another military coup in 1969. The new government was tough on the Mahdists and bombed Aba Island. One morning in the North of England I turned on my radio and heard that Imam El Hadi had been shot dead in cold blood as he tried to cross the border into Ethiopia.

I still feel the sorrow of that moment. He was one of the Sudanese I had prayed for nearly every night for years, a dear friend. I wrote an appreciation of his life which was published in The Times newspaper. But then I remembered the thoughts which had come to me that morning on Aba Island five years before. Why had I not had the courage to tell him? El Hadi had somehow lost his way by trying to be too much of a politician. That was a judgement on me, and perhaps others of his friends, who had failed to be straight with him about what we most deeply felt to be his calling. By my man-pleasing I had contributed to his dreadful death. I could be forgiven, but my nature needed to change. Over the next years I found the chance to apologise to his brother and daughter and others of the family. They said that many others had tried to persuade him, and my words would not have made any difference. Of course that may be true. But it is also part of friendship to speak the truth you see, and risk losing the friendship.

Happy memories of El Hadi are still uppermost. He helped me on one occasion when I was down in my spirits. There was a Scottish teacher I hoped to marry, but she was far away. Alone in my small flat, I had three miserable days of bachelor self-pity. Each

morning the only thought that came was to go and see El Hadi. Twice I reasoned that I was in no fit state to see him, but on the third day I just went. He greeted me with his usual big smile and said, “I have been trying to get in touch with you for three days. King Faisal of Saudi Arabia is coming to dinner with me tonight, and I would like you to be there.”

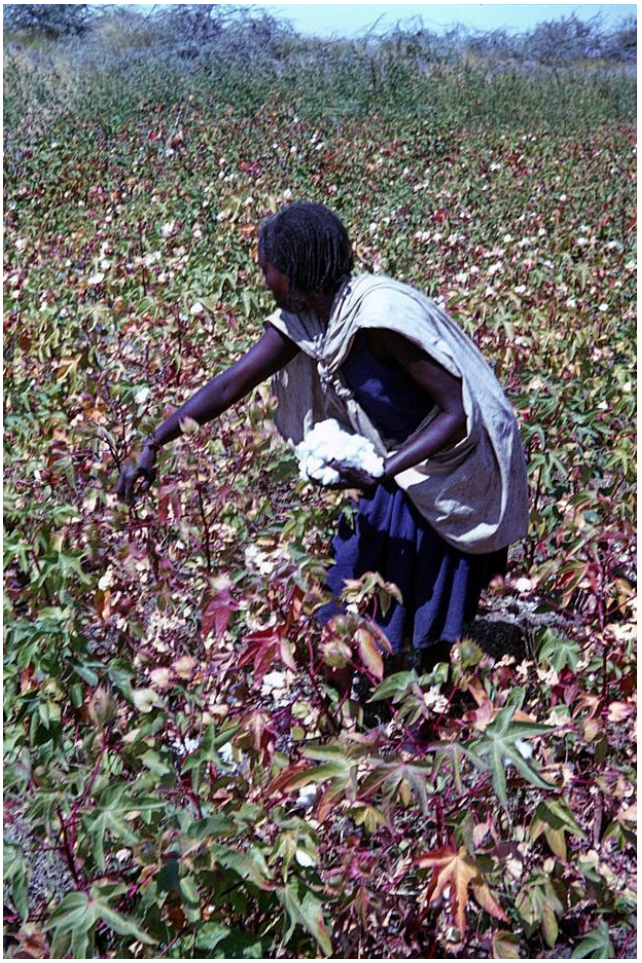
The King was on a state visit and it was Imam El Hadi's duty to lay on a banquet for him. There were about 80 guests, including most of the Sudan Government. I was not presented to the King, but it was fascinating to study his face from a few yards away and think of all the major responsibilities he carried. El Hadi, as so often, had stretched my heart and mind.

Footnote: a few years later Jean the Scottish teacher said yes to my proposal and we have now been married 44 years. There have been several visits to Sudan together, sometimes with our son. Members of the Mahdi family, including El Hadi's son, are among the many Sudanese who have visited our London home.

Sunrise at Aba Island. White Nile in the distance.

Mango tree

Aba cotton



Aba cotton

Site of the cave where the Mahdi meditated

The Palace

The Imam's staff

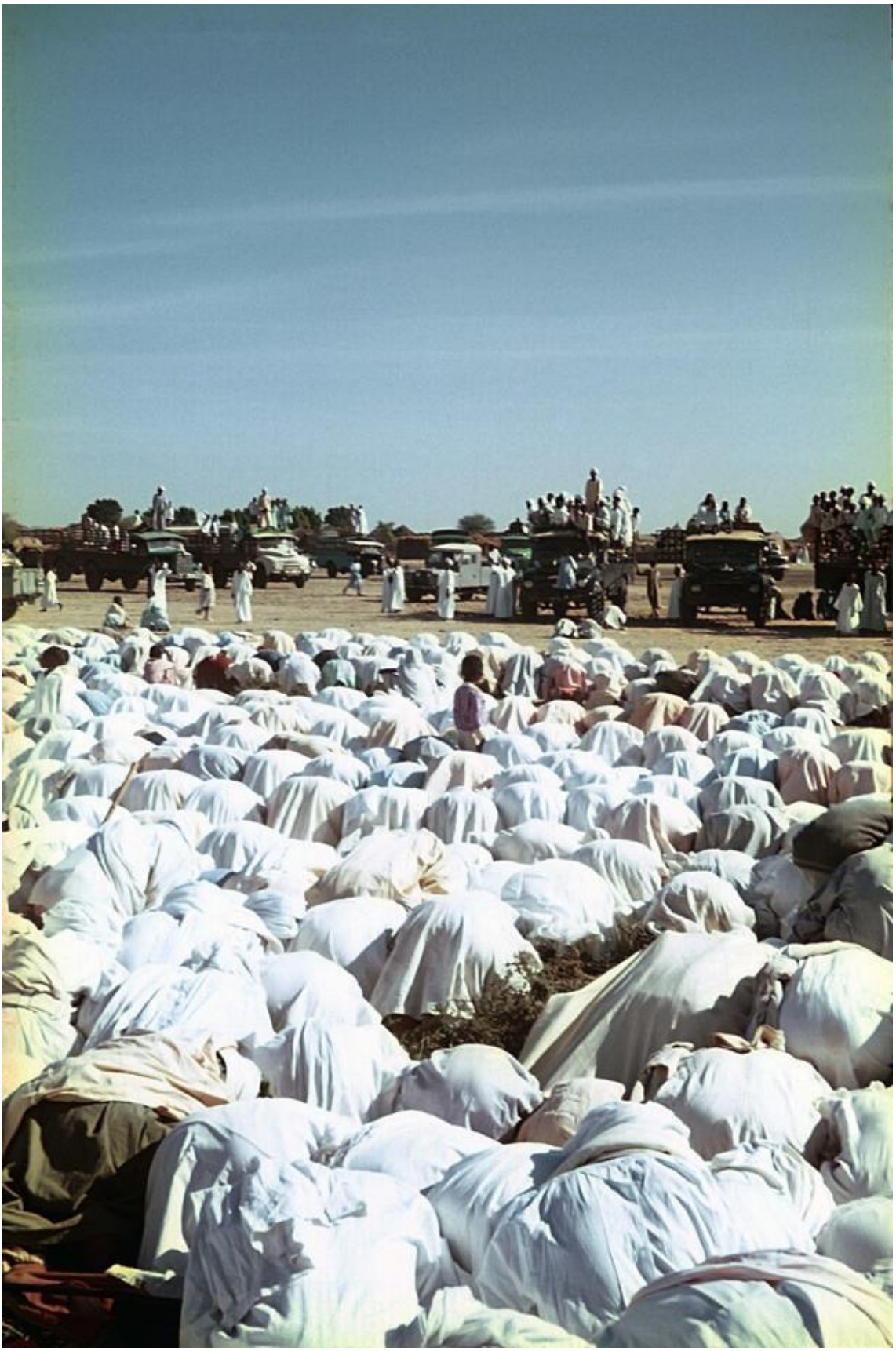
Listening to the Id sermon

Id prayers

Id prayers

Ram’s horn trumpet

Imam El Hadi giving the Id sermon

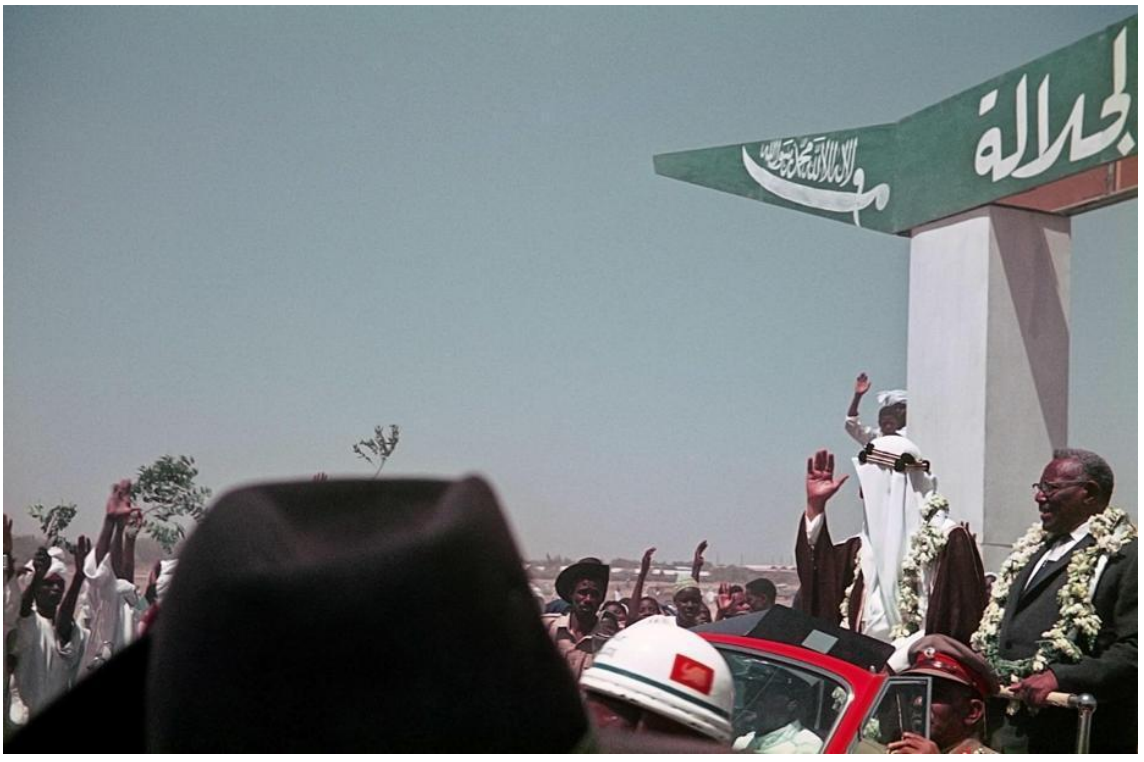


Id prayers

Saluting the Imam after prayers

Moving away as the shadows lengthen

Sayed Abdullahi El Fadil El Mahdi with a senior Saudi at Khartoum airport



President Ismail El Azhari with King Faisal of Saudi Arabia at Khartoum airport

ABA ISLAND

For several years before launching his campaign Mohammed Ahmed, who became known as El Mahdi, meditated in a cave on Aba Island in the White Nile. Captains of passing river craft would dock to seek a 'baraka' (blessing) from him, and a community of believers grew up around him. My first visit to Aba was in 1962 as guest of his grandson Ahmed el Mahdi. I slept under the stars on a flat roof facing East towards the river.

Through endless sands still wrapped in dark and cold
  The dawn-lit ribbon of the Nile glides by;
God paints his daily masterpiece in gold
  Across the cloudless canvas of the sky.

No desert dweller savours that fresh hour;
  No tribe parades to greet that glorious day;
For with the burden of a foreign power
  Is matched their own division and decay.

But in the mind of one who sits and prays
  There dawns the vision of God's master plan –
That perfect plan unfolded phase by phase
  To humble men of faith since time began.

It is the Mahdi who in Aba's cave
  For years has pondered, disciplined and calm,
How best inspire the weak, unite the brave,
  How best recall the nations to Islam.

The dawn of later years an island shows
  Where all the tribes live, prosperous and free;
The Mahdi's heirs welcome their former foes –
  A pattern for the whole world's unity.

O may this generation in their age,
  Reaping the fruits of freedom from his grave,
Read right their land's success from history's page –
  Remember that it started in the cave!

Peter Everington

KORDOFAN AND DARFUR

As mentioned before, Ahmed Abu Shama was District Commissioner of Port Sudan. We kept in touch by letter after he became DC of Geneina, a Darfur town on the border with Chad. He wrote encouraging me to visit him there. The chance came in1964 when the Intermediate School final exams were to be marked in Khor Taggat school near El Obeid in Kordofan. At the start of the school holidays, about two hundred secondary school teachers from around the country gathered for this task.

Before the marking I managed a two-day visit to Kadugli. When I had been in Khartoum Hospital four years before, I was very well looked after by a nurse called Ahmed Suleiman. He told me a lot about his home in the Nuba Mountains, and this was a chance to see him again and his region briefly.

The marking week at Khor Taggat went smoothly. Another British teacher Ian Morrison had asked to come with me to Darfur, and we took the train from El Obeid to Nyala. We stayed two days in the rest house which in British days had been the home of the DC of the Baggara, the nomadic tribe who roam over that wide area. From there we went by lorry on a southern approach to Jebel Marra, the mountain massif in the middle of Darfur which rises to about 10,000 feet. We passed through Kas, Mortajello and Nyertiti. Then there was a three-hour journey on horseback to reach the village of Boldong in the foothills. We stayed a night in a thatched hut (qut'iya in Arabic). At dawn a local guide came to lead us on a long walk to the summit through a maze of gullies and paths. At the height of that part of Jebel Marra is an extinct volcano called Deriba. From its lip we climbed down to the grassy floor of the crater which has a sweet water lake and a salty lake. Local herdsmen bring cattle there for summer pasture.

We arrived back at our qut'iya at sunset after eleven hours walking. Abu Shama had alerted another DC called Karamallah to our presence in Darfur. He sent a truck to bring us to his town Zalingei, and received us in his official residence with great warmth and hospitality. While there Ian Morrison and I decided we needed a haircut. The town barber worked in the open under an arcade. Two khawajas (white Europeans) having their hair cut was a local sensation and a crowd gathered to watch. The barber's technique was to make a horizontal line halfway up the back of the head and cut off everything below it. I tried with Arabic and gestures to ask for a graded effect. Nobody understood until an old man called out, "Ah yes, like a qut'iya". In line with another Sudanese custom, Karamallah generously paid the fare to our next destination, a lorry journey to Geneina in the far West of Darfur.

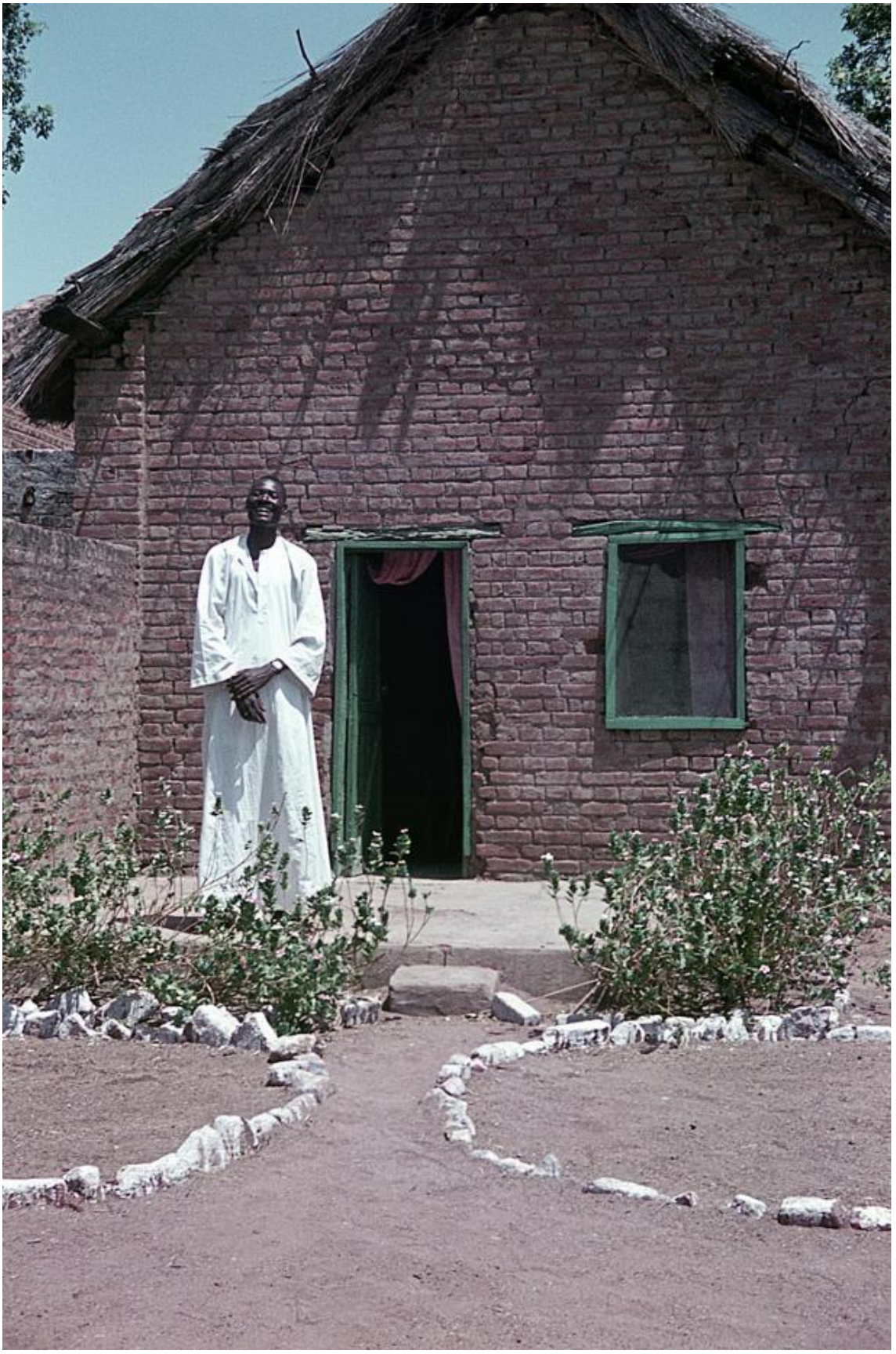
This is the moment to sing the praises of the Austin lorry, and the Bedford, the universal ships of the Sudanese desert in the 1960s. The first class passengers, up to four of them, travelled alongside the driver on a padded bench. Second class were behind on the open lorry, sitting on the cargo. The driver was an autocrat like a ship's captain. His crew consisted of 'musa'id mekaniki', technical assistant whose job was to deal with the engine, and crises like punctures and getting stuck in sand. The second was 'musa'id halla', literally a saucepan assistant. Whenever the lorry stopped in a village for a long break, this young man's job was to light a fire, boil a kettle for tea, go off and buy a chicken, kill it, pluck it, cook it, and serve it with rice and vegetables to the captain and the first class passengers at the captain's table. This was usually a patch of swept earth in the shade of a tebeldi (baobab tree), and we dipped our fingers into dishes laid out in the middle.

Such was the midday heat that, on long hauls, the day's journey would be from dawn (around 4) until 10, and then from about 3 in the afternoon till 9, well after sunset. At night there were roadside stops for lorries, where you could find food and drink, and an angareeb (wooden bed with a woven rope base), to sleep on under the stars. None of the roads in Kordofan and Darfur were metalled. At best there was a beaten earth track, which tended to corrugate. Our two-week journey round Darfur was probably 700 miles, in different lorries, all of it done in second and third gear. The conversation with the driver was in Arabic, intermittent because he had to concentrate so intensely. One driver, when he ran into perilous situations, produced a rich vocabulary of English swearwords that could only have derived from the British Army. The drivers' skills and the lorries' stamina were phenomenal. The rains began on our last leg from El Fasher to El Obeid. One night the beaten track lay under a pool of water fifty yards long. The driver gritted his teeth as he took the risk and moved forward. The headlights were under water at times, but the engine kept going.

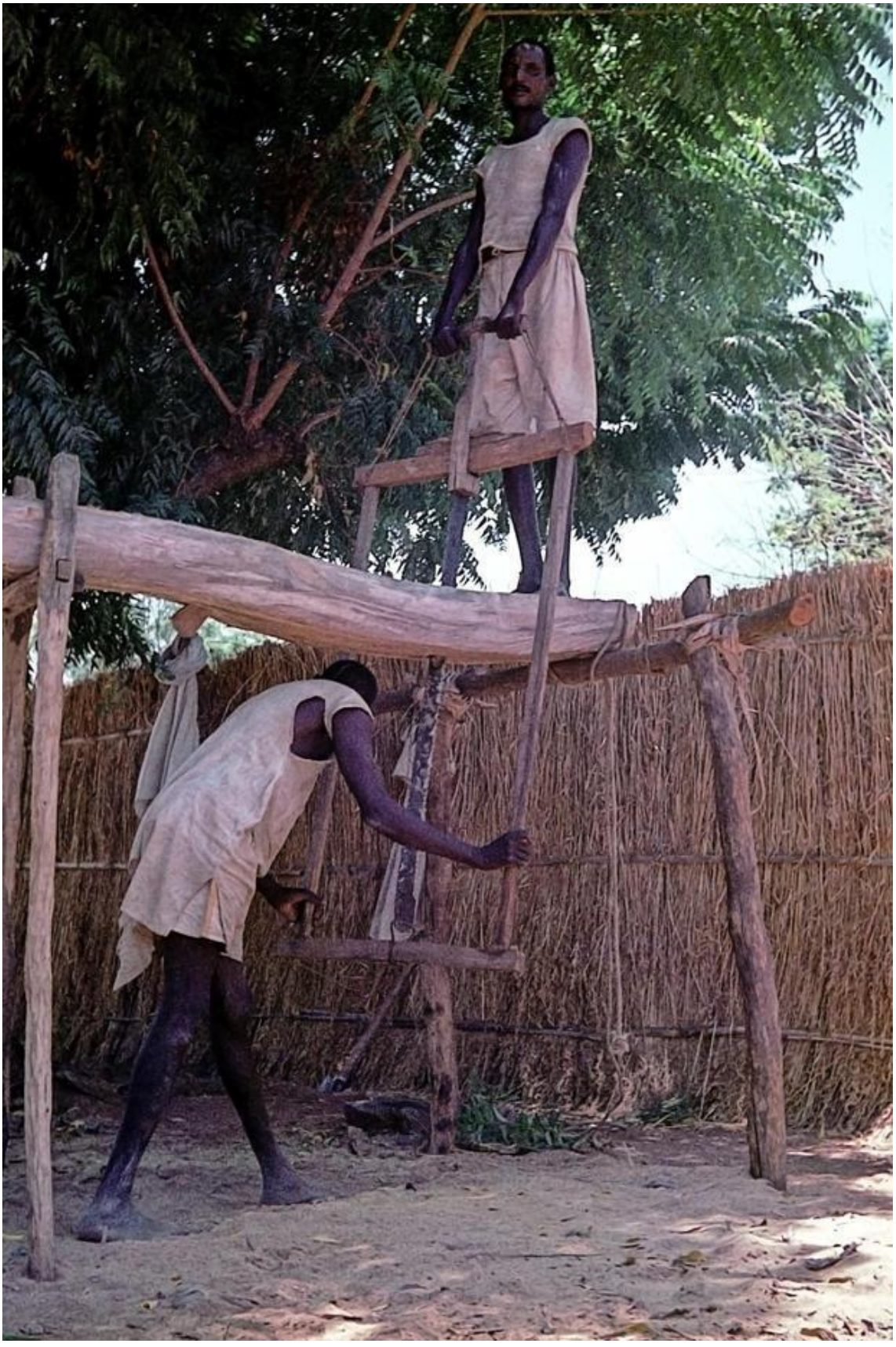
When we arrived in Geneina, Ahmed Abu Shama had been called away on duty, but he had laid on everything for us, including a day visit to Adre on the other side of the Chad border. Our two-day journey East from Geneina took us through Kebkabiya to El Fasher. There it was of special interest to see the palace of Sultan Ali Dinar. In the First World War the Caliph of the Ottoman Empire in Istanbul sent out a decree that all the Muslim world should align with Germany. Ali Dinar was the only senior Muslim in Sudan to obey this decree. He duly rebelled against the British and declared the Sultanate of Darfur independent. In 1916 the British mounted an expedition that defeated his army and killed him. He remains a heroic figure in Sudanese history.

Ian Morrison and I made a day visit North to Kutum and to nearby archaeological remains at Ain Farah. Our final lorry journey, from El Fasher to El Obeid, through Damjamad and Nahud, took three days and nights. From El Obeid it was a twenty-four hour journey by train back to Khartoum. This short account, with a few photos, can only give a glimpse of the experience of a lifetime.

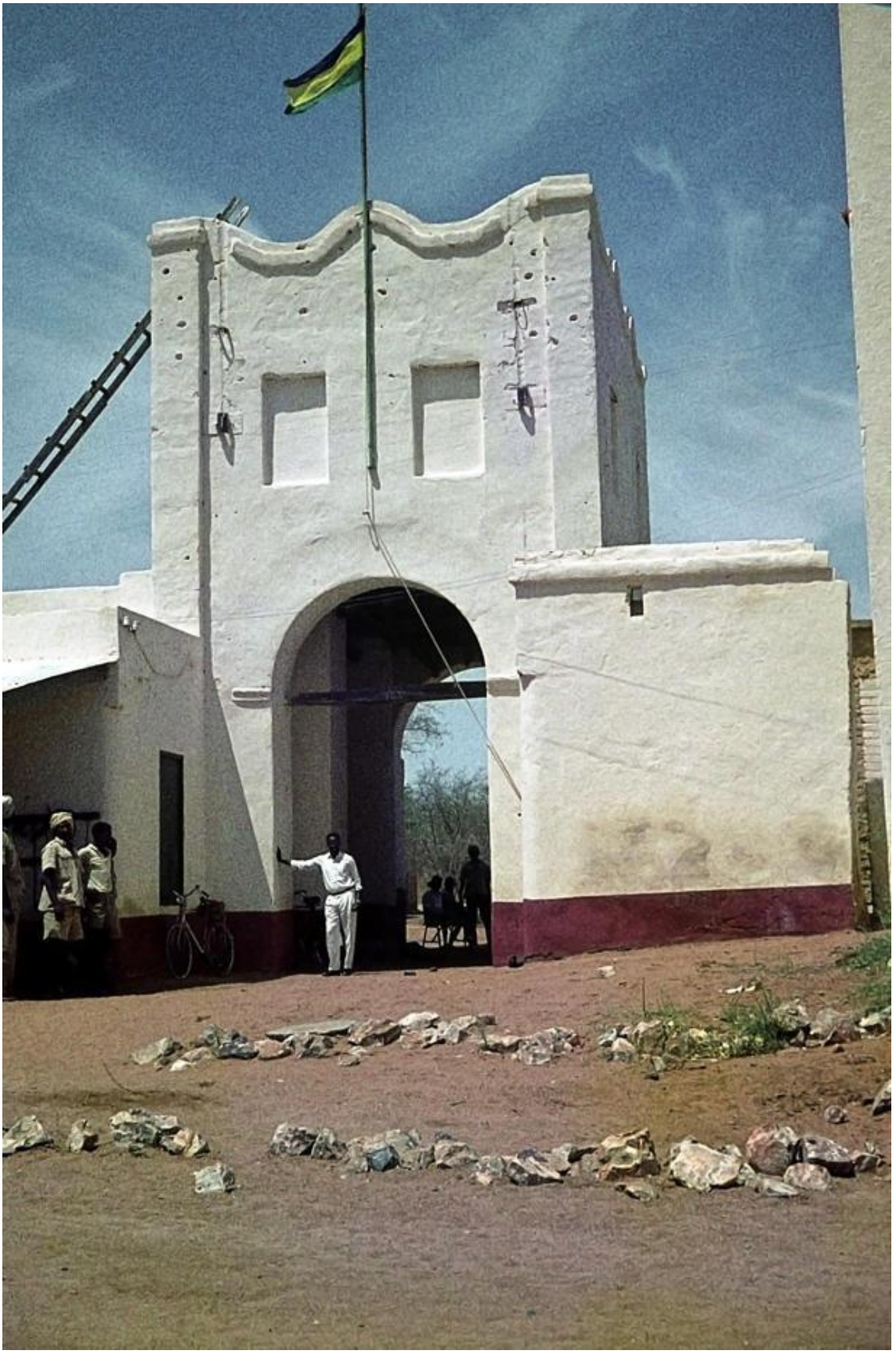
A glimpse of the Nuba Mountains



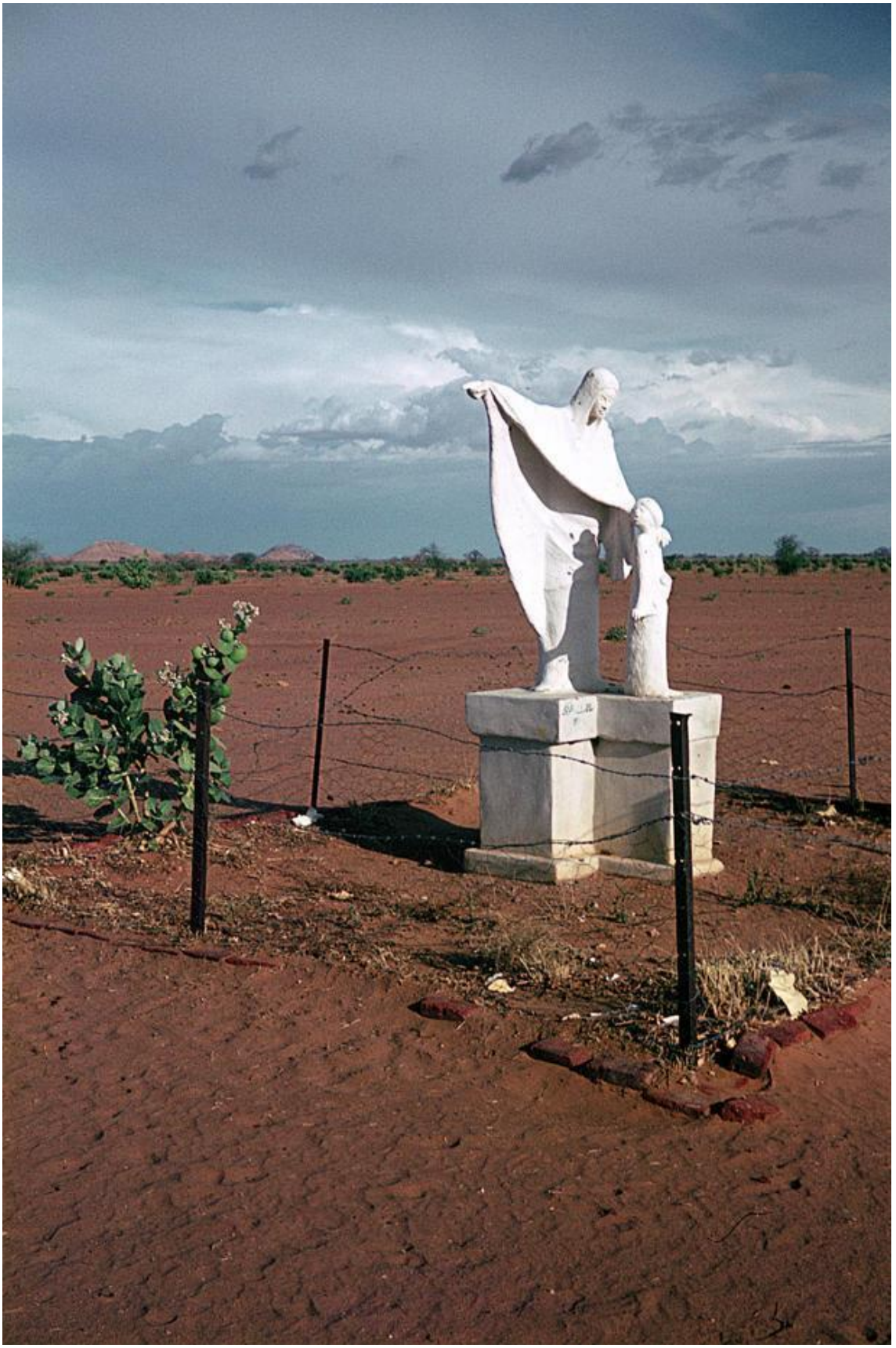
Kadugli, Ahmed Suleiman



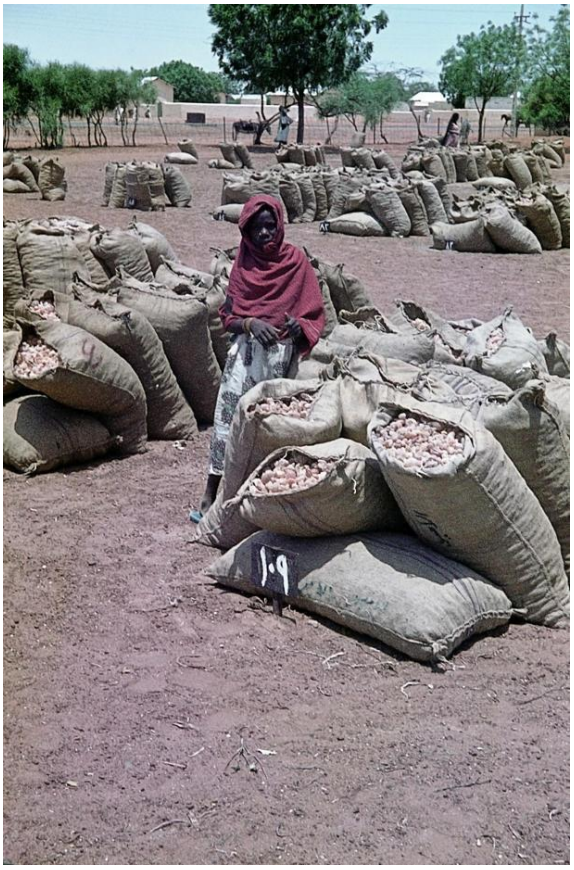
Two-man sawing



El Obeid municipality



Khor Taggat school statue




El Obeid gum market

The auction

Reservoir (hafeer)

School bell at Khor Taggat

Begging water from the train to Nyala

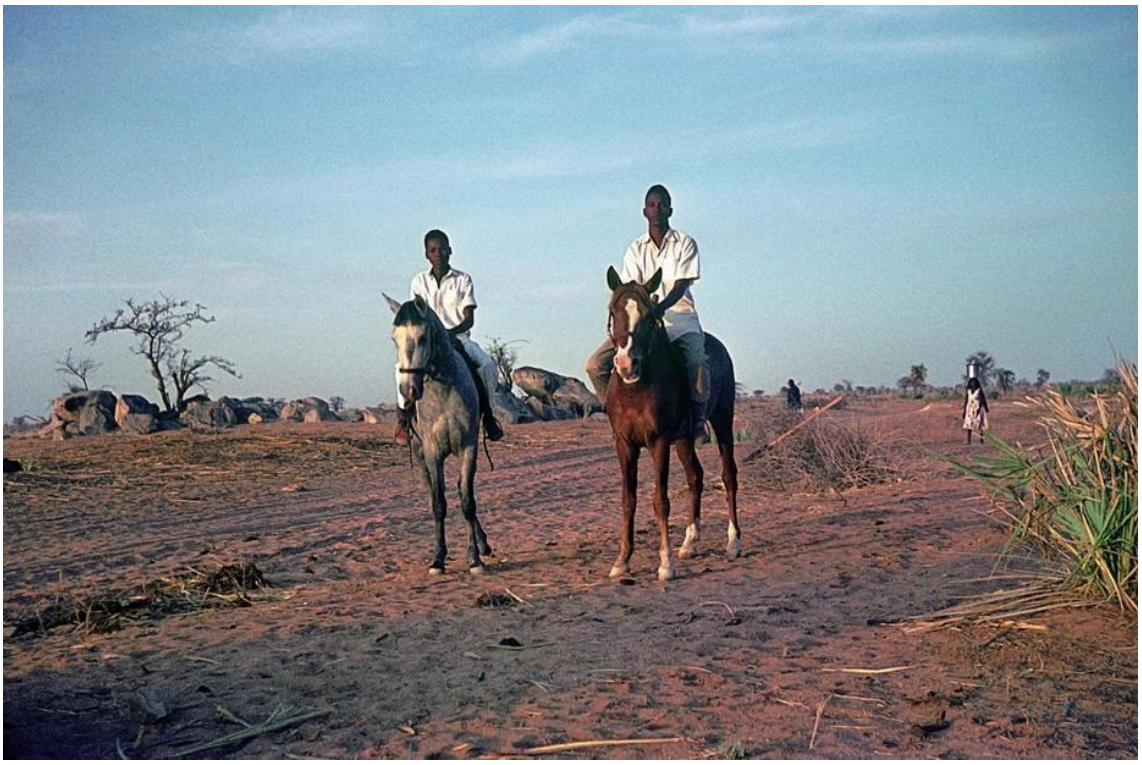
Nyala khor
وادي نيالا

There are images in Sudan which illustrate passages of the Bible. A khor is a dried river bed where water flows for perhaps only two months of the year. It was a marvel to me how green this tree was after nine months of drought. I later discovered a passage in the book of Jeremiah, chapter 17, verses 7 and 8:

But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit.

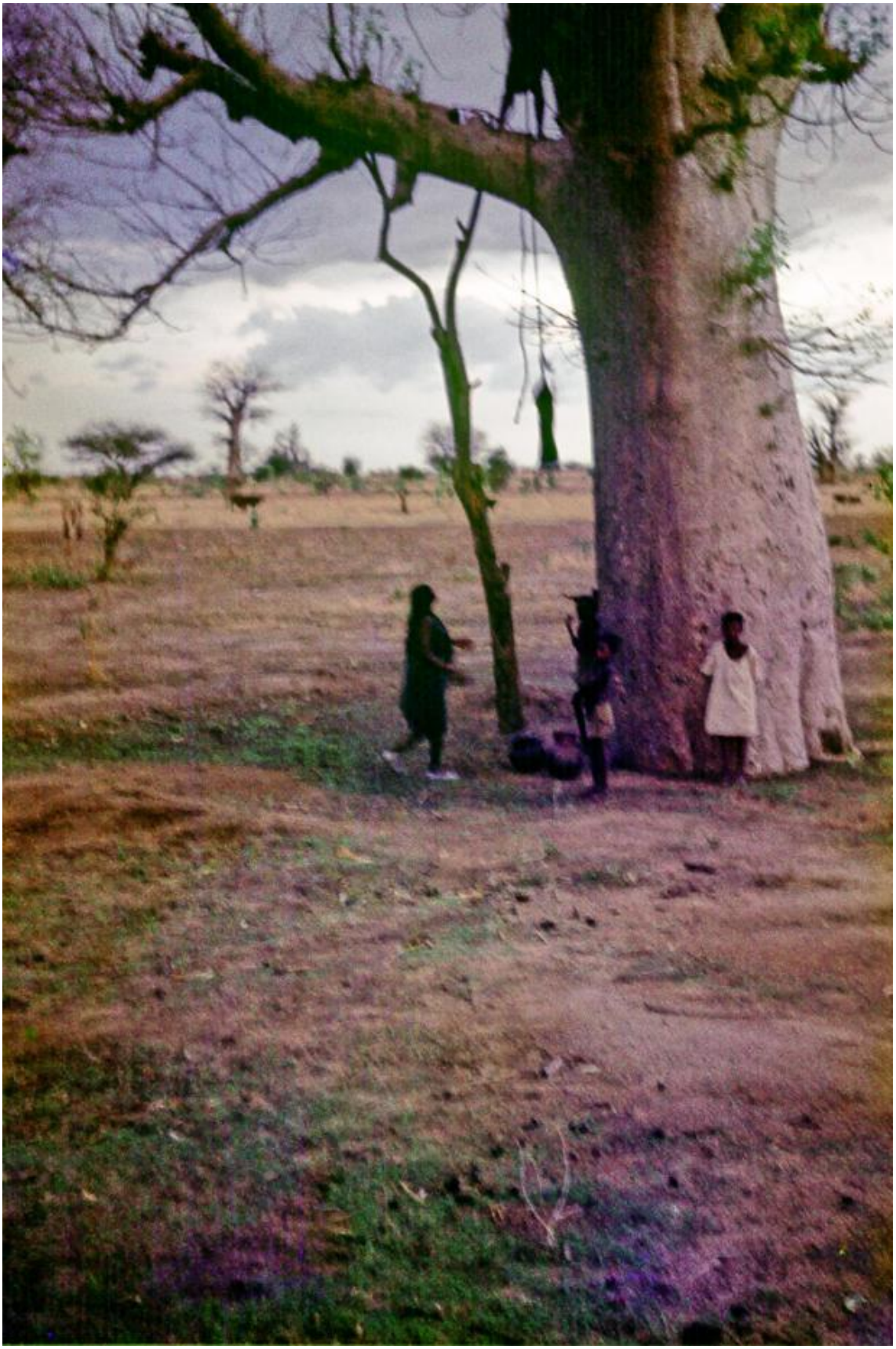
[Arabic version:]

وَلَكِنْ مُبَارَكٌ الرَّجُلُ الَّذِي يَتَّكِلُ عَلَى الرَّبِّ، وَيَتَّخِذُهُ مُعْتَمَداً لَهُ، يَكُونُ كَشَجَرَةٍ مَغْرُوسَةٍ عِنْدَ الْمِيَا هِ، تَمُدُّ جُذُورَهَا إِلَى الْجَدْوَلِ، وَلاَ تَخْشَى اشْتِدَادَ الْحَرِّ الْمُقْبِلِ، إِذْ تَظَلُّ أَوْرَاقُهَا خَضْرَاءَ، وَلاَ يُفْزِعُهَا الْقَحْطُ لأَنَّهَا لاَ تَكُفُّ عَنِ الإِثْمَارِ.

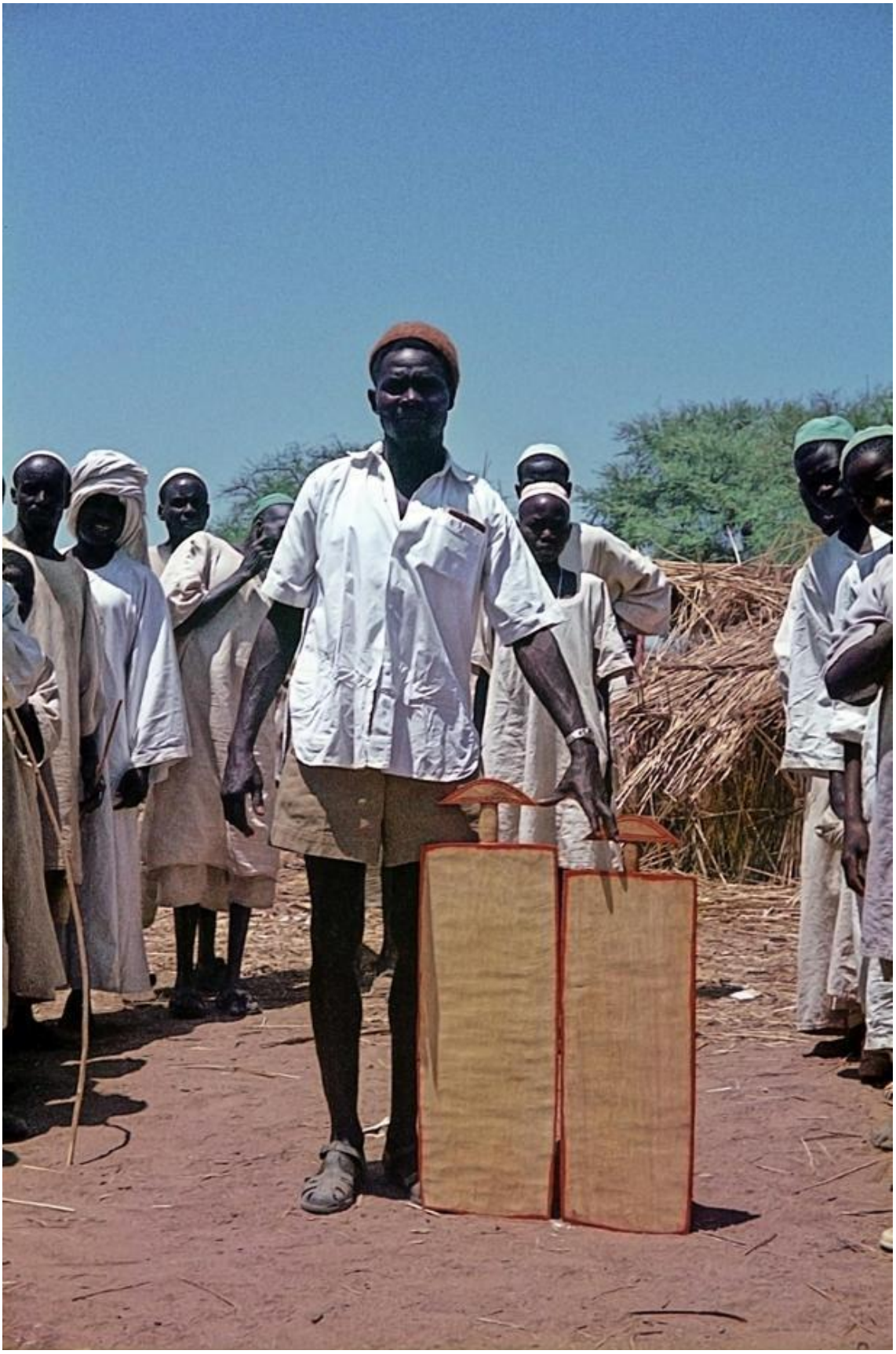


Nyala, famous for horses

Nyala Cattle market



Kas weekly meat market



Quran learning boards at Kas

A swim at Nyertiti

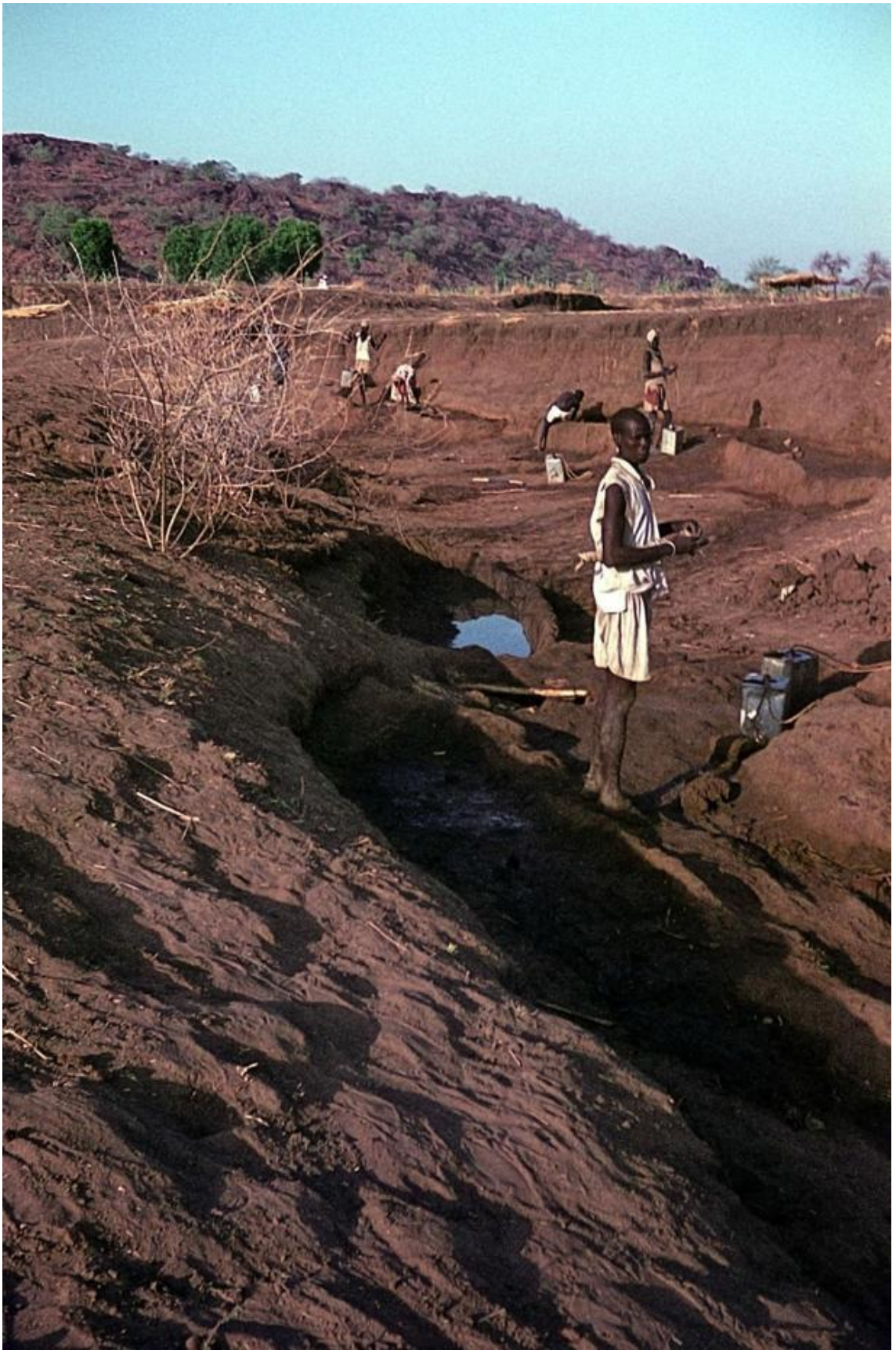
Towards Jebel Marra on horseback

Base camp in Bolding with view of Jebel Marra summit

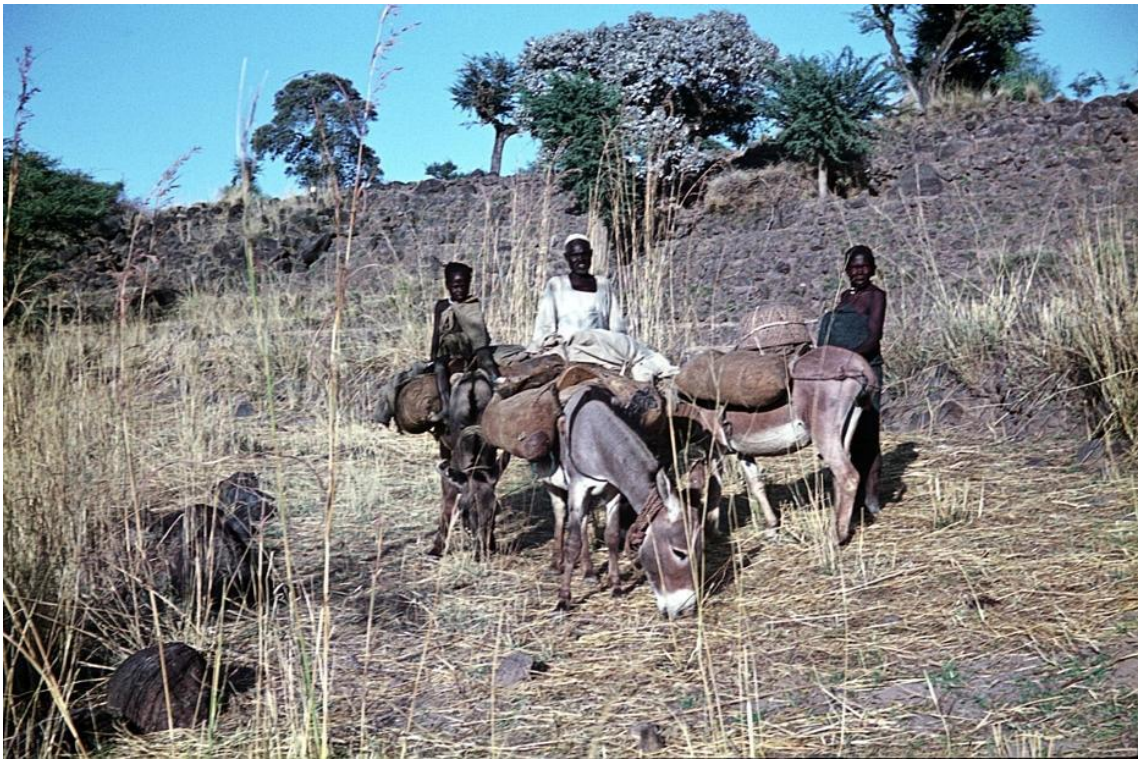
Early start on the ascent

Looking back after an hour. We needed our guide!

The search for water



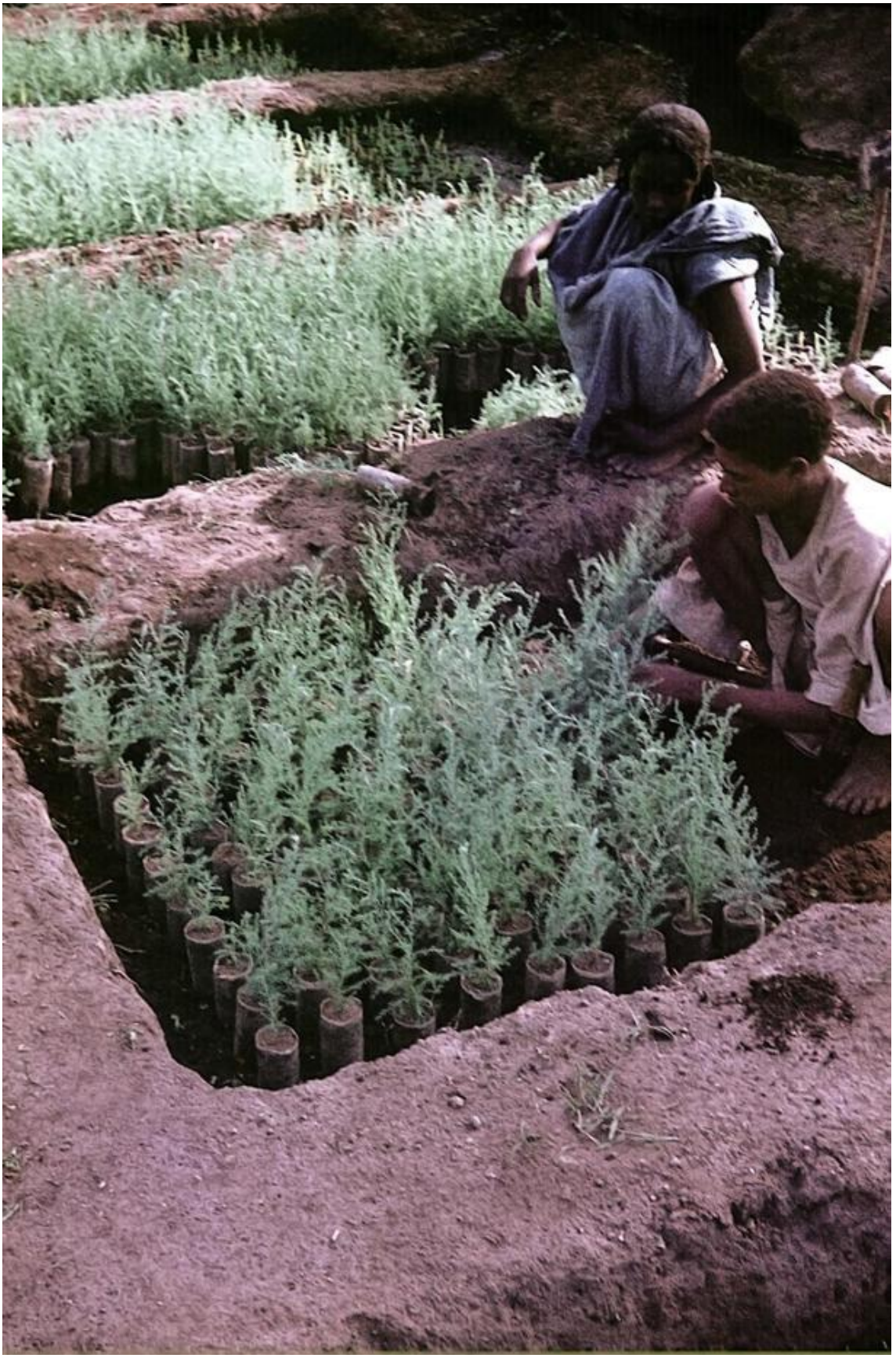
Looking for water



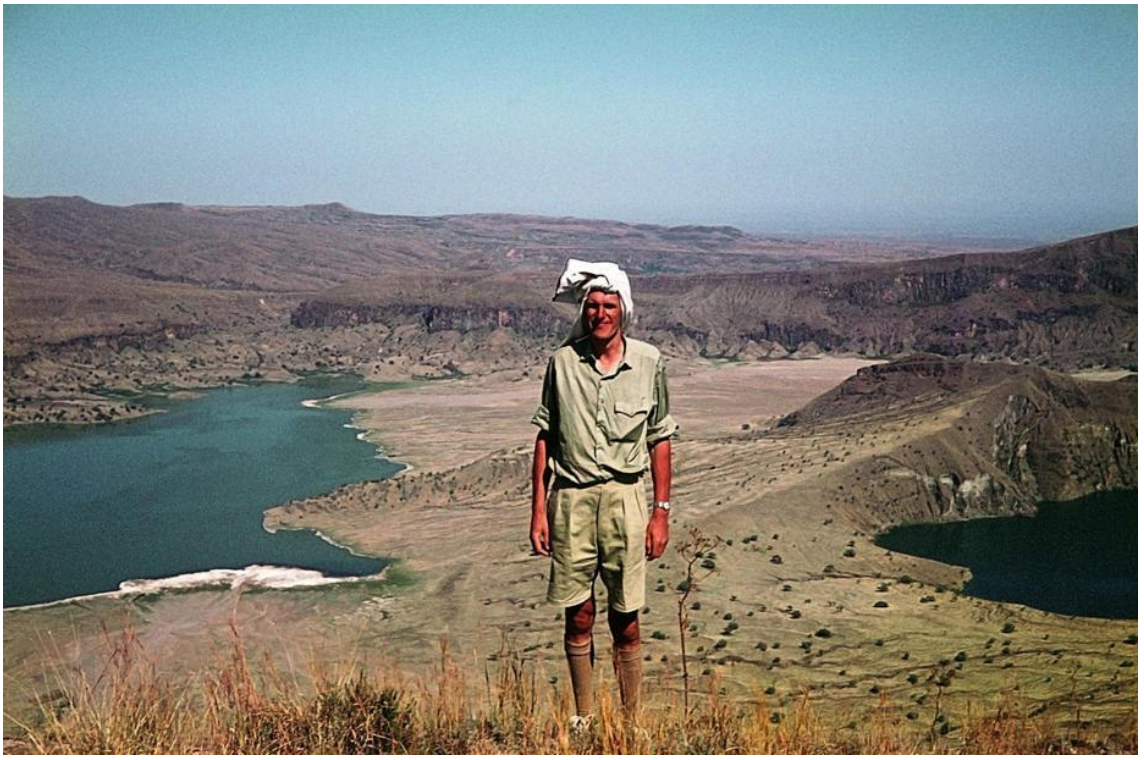
Jebel Marra water

Cultivation on the mountainside

Tree nursery



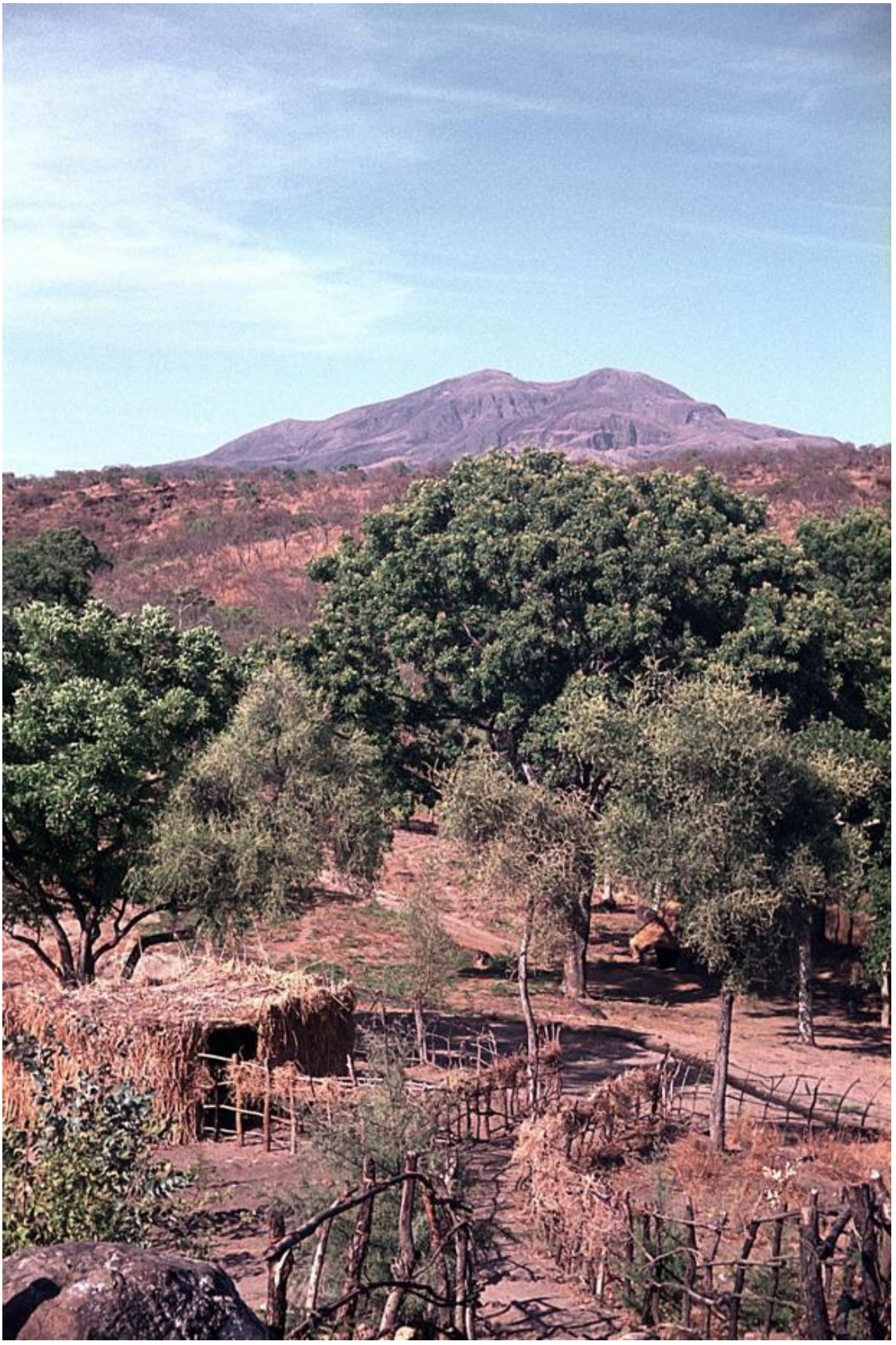
Nursery



The summit looking down on Deriba with its two lakes, one mineral, one sweet water

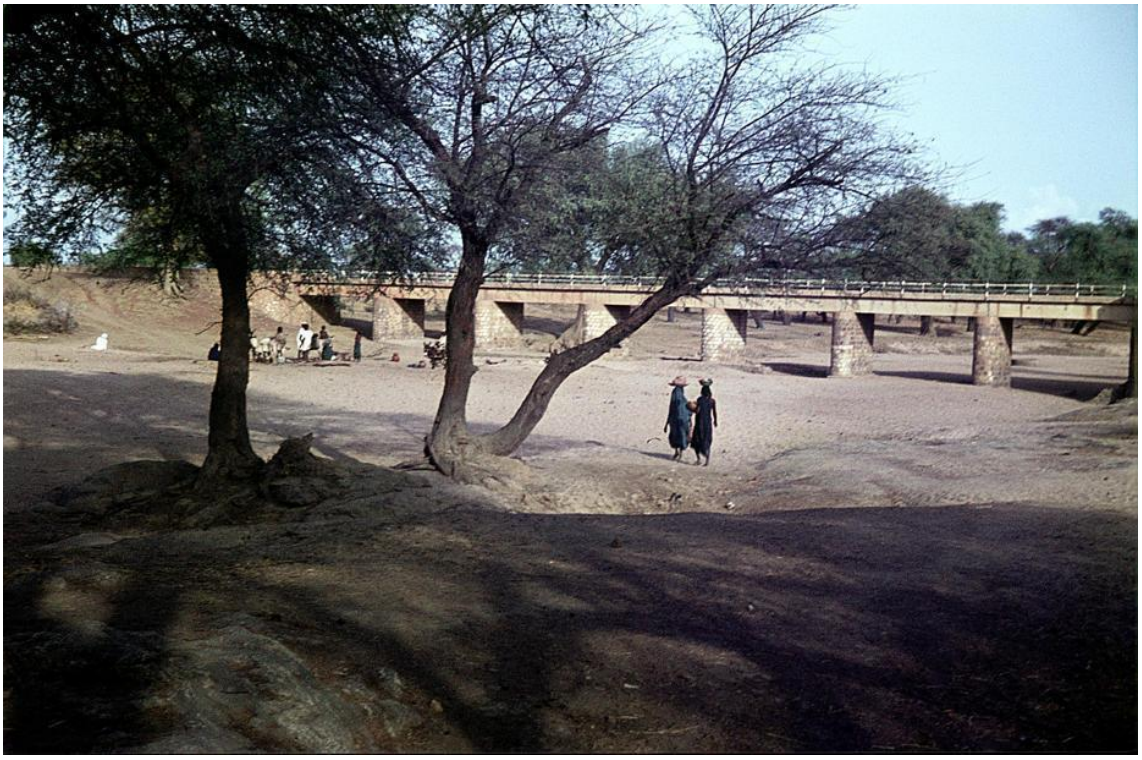
On the floor of Deriba looking up to
the summit

Back to the hotel after 11 hours walking



... Looking back as we left

and farewell ...



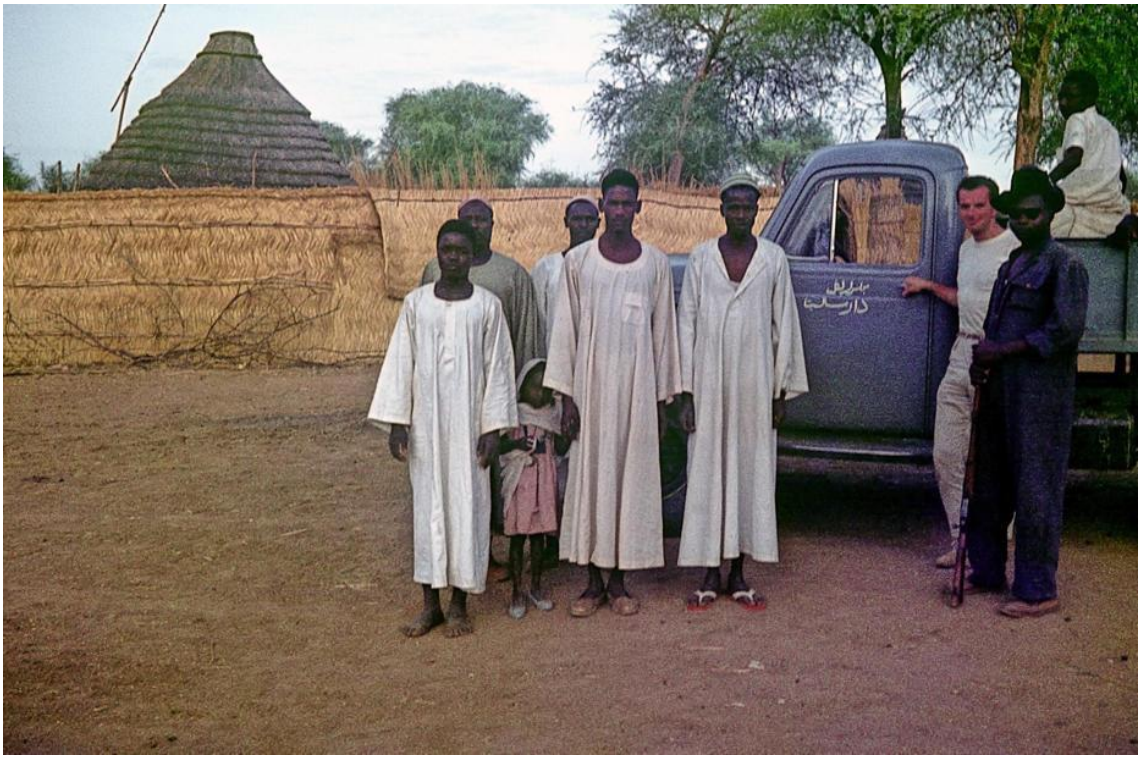
Geneina khor

Geneina Id

Geneina horses

Adre in Chad, near Sudan border

Id trumpeter in Adre



On the road from Geneina to El Fasher. Birka Saira police post, night stop

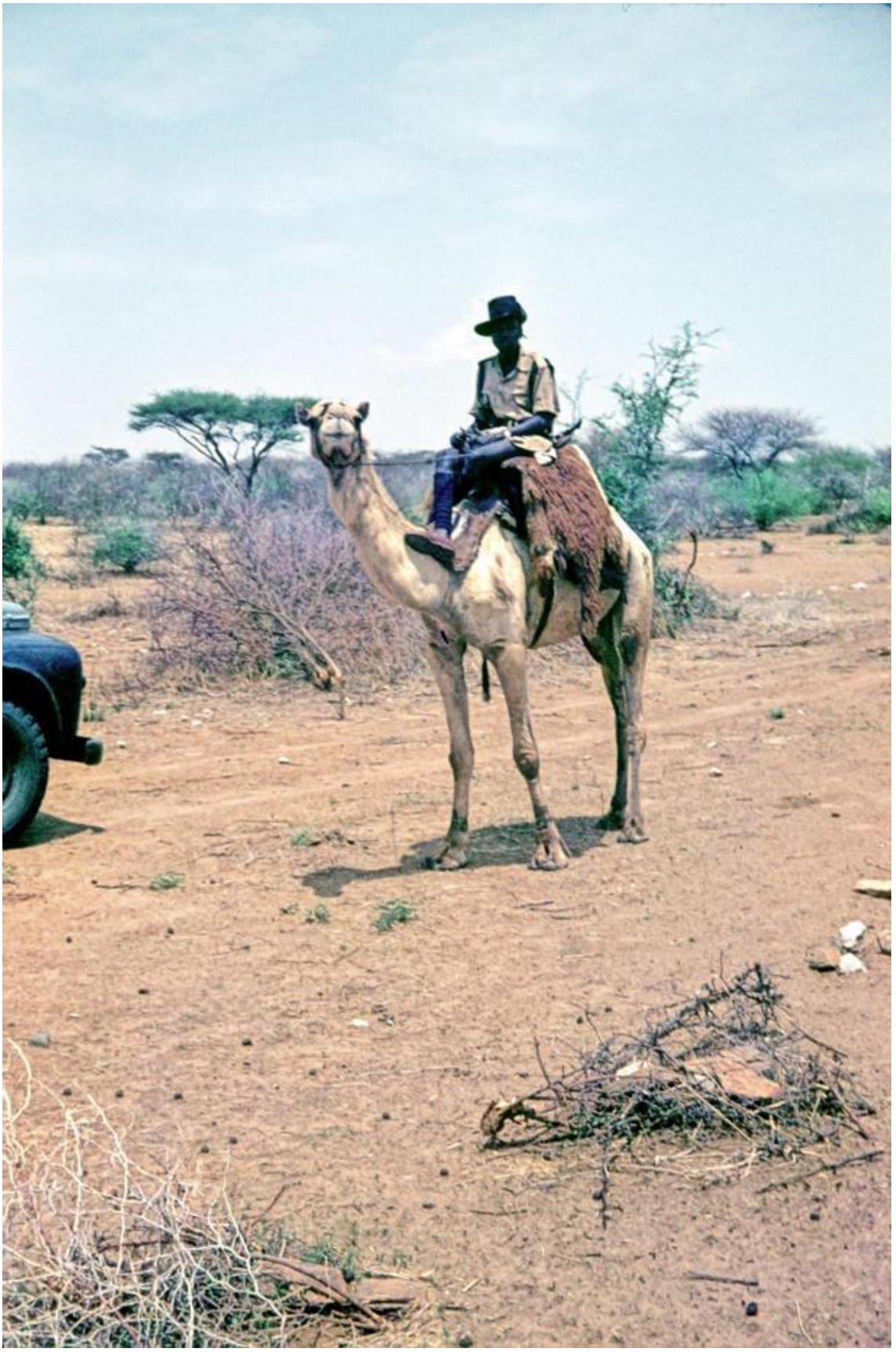
Darfur rains

Darfur, lorry puncture

Kebkabiya mosque

El Fasher town

Sultan Ali Dinar's drum



Darfur police patrol

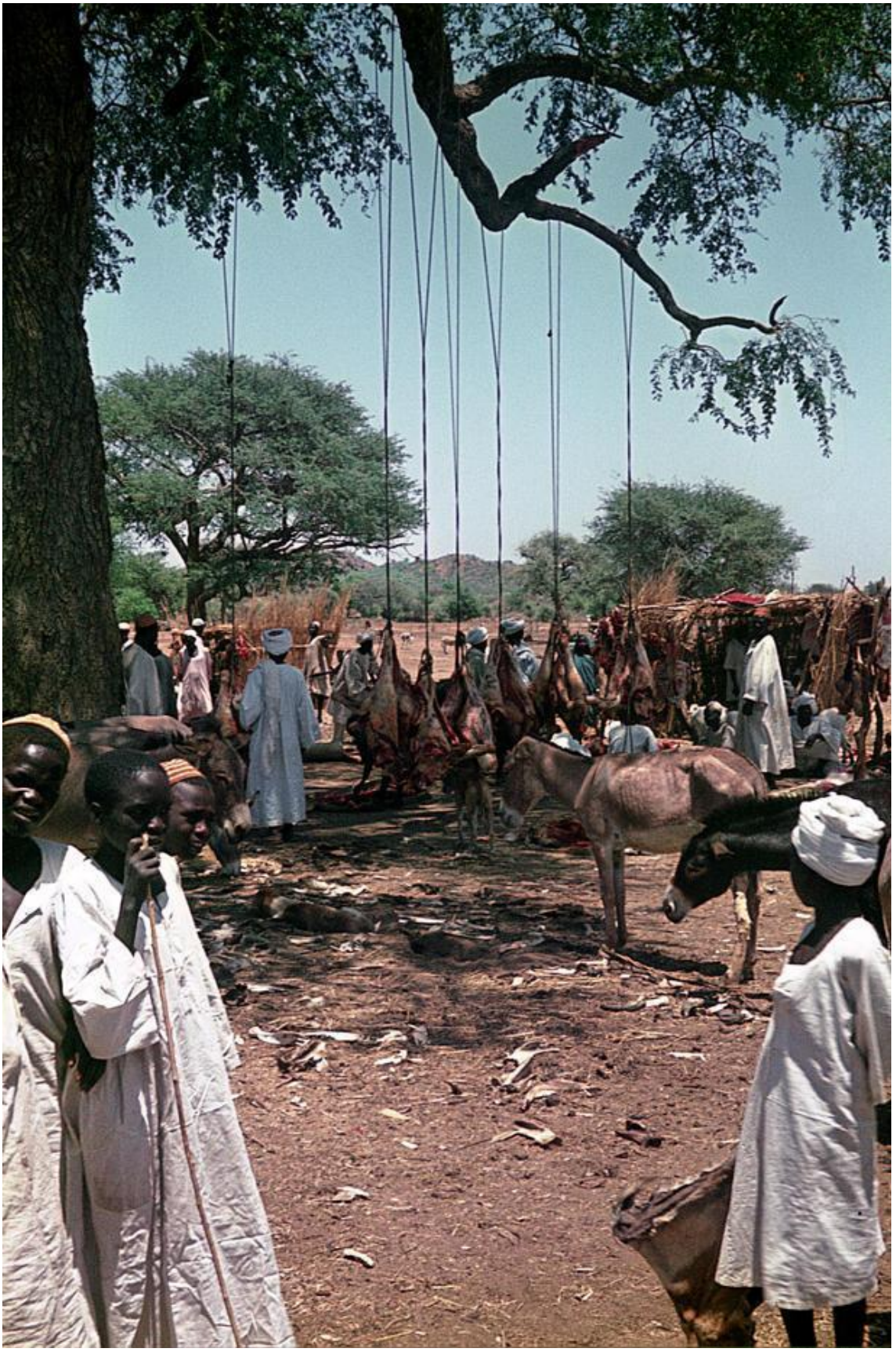
Ain Farah, near Kutum

On the three-day journey by lorry from El Fasher to El Obeid. Damjamad souk

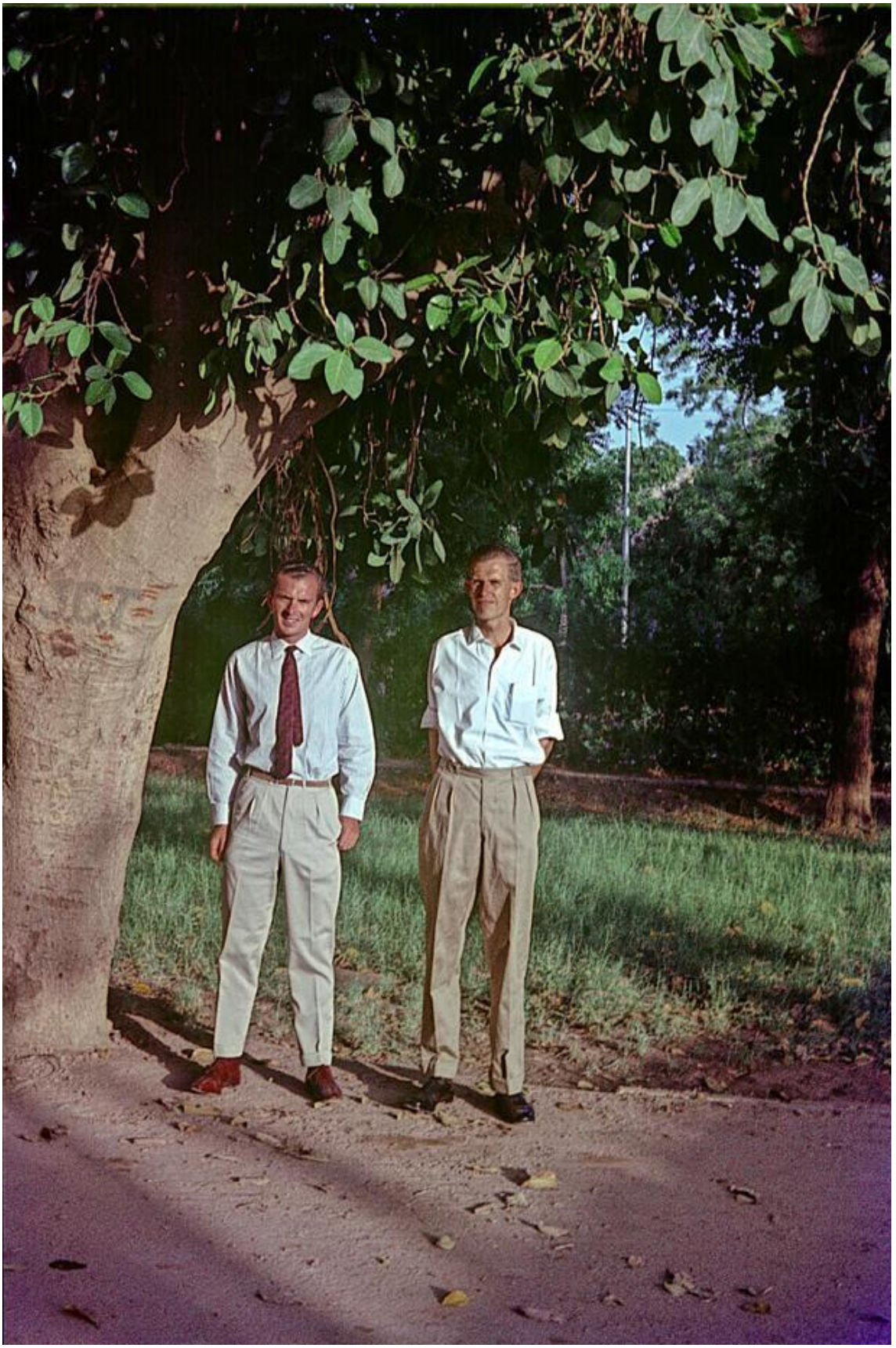
Damjamad camel medicine

Lunch break under a baobab

Baobab in the village square



Drawing water in a goatskin from the baobab's reservoir



Teachers back in Khartoum. Ian Morrison (left) and Peter Everington

ALI DINAR'S RIFLE

On the British campaign of 1916 against Sultan Ali Dinar, the Assistant Intelligence and Political Officer was Geoffrey Sarsfield-Hall. He came from Ireland, and had joined the Sudan Political Service in 1909. After the campaign he became District Commissioner of North Darfur in Kutum, and later Governor of Kordofan. His final post was Governor of Khartoum from 1929 to 1936. Among the souvenirs he brought back to Britain on retirement was a rifle made in 1885 with a silver decoration on its butt, inscribed in Arabic 'Ali Dinar'.

After Sarsfield-Hall died his daughter Carol offered to return the rifle to Sudan in March 1985. I collected it in its cardboard wrapping from her family home in Cumbria in the North of England, and travelled with it on the train back to London. The following day I took it, still in its wrapping, on the London Underground to the auctioneers Sotheby's to learn more about its provenance and value. They could not tell me much, but asked if I had a gun licence, which of course I hadn't. With today's surveillance cameras and anti-terrorist laws, there might have been trouble!

The following week Carol Sarsfield-Hall was invited to lunch at the Sudan Embassy by Ambassador Abdullahi El Hassan El Khidr. I brought the rifle from my home in London, and Carol Sarsfield-Hall handed it over with these words:

"It gives me great pleasure to return to the Sudan, through Your Excellency, this gun which belonged to Sultan Ali Dinar of Darfur. The Sultan had declared a Holy War against Great Britain. Now I feel it is the destiny of Britain and Sudan to battle shoulder to shoulder together against the evils besetting our world.

"I know my father loved the Sudan, and during the 27 years he was in the country made his contribution in many practical ways; but what he received in return in the way of friendship and appreciation from the people of Sudan is incalculable.

"I am glad to be able to express his gratitude today by returning this gun as a token of the lasting friendship between our two countries, particularly at this difficult time – and a bridge between our two faiths."

The Ambassador expressed great appreciation, and an article with photo appeared in the Khartoum Arabic paper El Sahafa.

Ali Dinar's rifle, presented by Carol Sarsfield-Hall to Ambassador Abdulla El Hassan El Khidr at Sudan Embassy in London

YEMEN

When I first came to Port Sudan in 1958 there was a large Yemeni community. Among them was the grocer with whom I had a monthly account, and Bawaris, the landlord of my flat. There were Yemeni boys in Port Sudan Secondary. In Barclays Bank, Khartoum, in the early 1960s you would often find a group of dignified Yemeni traders sitting on the floor waiting for a financial transfer to come through.

On British maps in those days, Yemen meant the Kingdom of North Yemen with its capital Sanaa. In the South was Aden, a British colony, surrounded by tribal protectorates which the British were trying to combine in the South Arabian Federation, hoping it would come to independence under that name. In the early 1960s the King of "North Yemen" was overthrown, and the country became a republic, in the orbit of Arab nationalism led by President Nasser's Egypt.

There were rival independence movements in Aden and the Federation, one of which was FLOSY, the Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen. The British Army and Royal Air Force were heavily involved in "keeping the peace" in this area at the South end of the Red Sea, which had been strategic for Empire and was still so in the Cold War.

The demise of Sudan's military government in October 1964 opened the way for Sudanese civilians to organise politically within the country and to have a say in their country's foreign policy. In Spring 1965 the Umma (Mahdist) party won the first elections to be held for six years. While we expatriates had no say in Sudan's politics, it was a relief for us too to be allowed to talk openly about what was going on in the country and the region. I was deeply concerned about the violence in Aden and South Arabia.

Many of us British had been working happily for years under an independent Arab-African government in Sudan. Why was the British Government unable to come to terms with those working for independence in Aden? Might the Sudanese help, from their own experience of negotiating independence? As a concerned British citizen, was there some small part I could play? The previous year in London a British friend called William Conner had introduced me to a member of the Jifri family from South Arabia. One of the family, Mohamed Ali Jifri, was a founder of the South Arabian Front. The British had banned the Front and exiled its leaders.

Sadik El Mahdi was President of the Umma Party. With his keen mind I knew he would have a view on Yemen, and so I went to discuss it with him. He encouraged me to do whatever I could. My father and mother were on a cruise ship which would stop at Aden in the middle of April on its way back to Britain. My annual leave was due at the end of March. So I flew to Aden a week before the ship arrived, and booked a passage on it as far as Suez.

The expatriate-type hotel in Aden was too expensive, so after one night I moved to a modest hotel in the crowded Arab area of Crater. It was packed with Somali pilgrims returning from the Hajj in Mecca. One night the British imposed a curfew on Crater. From an upper room of the hotel, we guests watched the British soldiers clattering through the dark street below with their rifles.

I learned that the hotel owner's daughter Radiyat Ihsan was a revolutionary nationalist who led many of the street demonstrations in Aden against the British. I asked to meet her and we talked in one of the public rooms. With fury she poured out all her feelings about the British. She had once been invited to meet the visiting British Secretary of State (Minister) for the Colonies, Arthur Greenwood, and had said the same things to him. I listened, asked questions, and told her what I was doing in Sudan and why I was in Aden. I came away with respect for her fire and commitment.

The Chief Minister of the Aden Legislative Council was Abdel Qawi Makkawi, leader of one of the parties. I watched him speak in the Council and was given an appointment with him later. He told me his party wanted good relations with the British and a negotiated path to independence. But there were two British conditions they could not accept. The first was the South Arabian Federation itself, whereby the urban population of Aden would apparently be just one equal element among traditional emirates or sultanates. The second was the insistence on a continuing British military base.

I visited the nearby Sultanate of Lahej and had a long talk with the Arab District Commissioner and others he introduced me to. One of them gave me an insight into the traditional values of the region, which sat uneasily with modern revolutionary doctrines. A politician in Sanaa had recently declared that nobody connected to the deposed royal family could be part of the new republican government. "And what right has that man to speak?" growled the man from Lahej. "His family came to Yemen from Afghanistan only 250 years ago."

With Abdel Qawi Makkawi, and with the British High Commissioner of Aden Sir Richard Turnbull, who I met later, I raised the subject of how the Sudanese might help ease the painful transition. They told me there were already plans to enlist Sudan's help. Turnbull had previously been Governor of Tanganyika and had played an active part in helping that country to independence. He struck me as someone who longed for an honourable hand-over of power but was struggling with issues beyond his control.

The other British official I met was Sir Arthur Charles, Speaker of the Legislative Council and also head of the Public Service Commission. As head of the Sudan Civil Service before independence, his task was to hand over all the government files to the new Sudanese administration, with all necessary briefing and training. Now he was engaged in the same painstaking work in Aden. He was very interested in my news of Sudan, and struck me as a humane and wise man who deeply believed in what he was doing.

Four months later Arthur Charles was shot dead on his way to play tennis with Adeni friends. It was clear that within a wide political spectrum there were two violent ideological groups. One way to gain ascendancy was to see how many senior British and Arab civil servants each could kill. By using these methods they were corrupting the new society they wanted to create.

That is not to excuse the British. Several years earlier the most active nationalist party had been the South Arabian Front, led by Mohamed Ali Jifri and others under the patronage of the Sultan of Lahej. True they had opposed Britain in the political struggle, but their methods were non-violent. The banning of the South Arabian Front and the exile of its leaders, including the Sultan, had left a political vacuum to be filled by others dedicated to violence.

The ship docked at Aden, and the passengers were warned to be extremely careful to avoid certain areas of the town, including the area where I was staying. My parents were nervous, but an Aden friend lent me his car, and I managed to show them some attractive places the other passengers would not see. After two days with them on the ship I took a bus from Suez to Cairo and went to talk with Mohammed Ali Jifri in the flat where he was living with his family. I expressed shame for his exile. Years later when we met again in London he expressed shame for his party's earlier abuse of the British, which he felt had goaded them to the line they took.

Back in London I found the British Government was making statements in Parliament blaming Egypt for inciting the violence in Aden. I wrote an account of my recent meetings to my Member of Parliament, Gilbert Longden (a Conservative), and he forwarded it to the (Labour) Secretary of State, Arthur Greenwood. A Mr Roberts from the Colonial Office came to see me and William Conner. My main point was that Britain could relax its insistence on the Federation and the base, and revoke the exile of the Sultan of Lahej and other leaders of the South Arabian Front.

Hearing that Sadik El Mahdi was to visit Aden with a group of political associates, I wrote to him listing the people I had seen and the issues as I understood them. By the time he returned I was back in Sudan for the new academic year. Sadik invited me to his home in Omdurman for a Friday breakfast which started at 8.30 and went on till 10. He listened to what I reported, and gave me his own insights into Britain and Yemen and the wider Middle East situation.

During the following year the Sudanese did try to assist a solution in Aden. But the situation became steadily more violent, and not long afterwards the British left Aden and South Arabia under duress, having secured neither the federation nor the base. My efforts at least showed me there are ways the ordinary citizen can take responsibility. And I had enjoyed exercising my UK democratic rights.

CHINESE DIPLOMATS

Chou En Lai, the Chinese Premier, made two tours of Africa in the mid-1960s. During each of them he declared “Africa is ripe for revolution”. He visited Sudan once to my knowledge. The Chinese have made an immense contribution to the development of the country. When I was there they were building a metalled road between Khartoum and Wad Medani. The Hantoub Bridge across the Blue Nile, Friendship Hall in Khartoum, and many other projects followed. I once asked a Sudanese journalist what was the difference between the Russian and the Chinese Communist approaches to Sudan. “When I go to the Soviet Embassy,” he said, “and mention some achievement in Sudan, I am immediately told how much more advanced the Soviets are. When I go to the Chinese Embassy I find a roomful of people translating the Sudanese papers from Arabic into Chinese.”

Ahmed El Mahdi gave a dinner at his Omdurman home in 1965 to celebrate the return of his elder brother the Imam El Hadi from pilgrimage to Mecca. I was invited and found I was seated next but one to the Chinese Ambassador, with his interpreter between us. The Ambassador asked why I was in Sudan. I replied that as a young soldier in Hong Kong I had a patronising attitude towards the Chinese. Some of us had behaved badly, and I was now sorry. I wanted to work for an independent African country with a different motive. The Ambassador (himself a former general, I later learned) smiled and said, “Soldiers are the same the world over.” A little later he asked if I would come and teach his young diplomats “good Oxford English”. I regretted this was not possible, but I could teach them Cambridge English.

For the next eight months or so I went to the Chinese Embassy nearly every week for an hour. There were six diplomats including the interpreter and wife, all delightful people. They treated me with the utmost courtesy. Spoken English was their need, so we conversed on the political situations of current interest to them. It was the time of the Vietnam War, so they cursed the Americans and the South Vietnamese, and praised the Ho Chi Minh Government of North Vietnam. I corrected their grammar and pronunciation. Another day the topic would be Africa, so Britain, France and the other imperial powers would come in for criticism.

Then came the week when Kwame Nkrumah, champion of African independence, was overthrown by a popular uprising in Ghana while he was on a visit to China. He had become corrupted by power, and erected a giant statue of himself. Inscribed on the base were the words, “Seek ye first the political kingdom”, a perversion of the teaching of Jesus “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God.” In his absence his enraged people had now toppled this statue.

“What is the reason for this coup?” I asked the Chinese. No answer.
“Imperialism?” They all said yes.
“Is imperialism always white?”
“Some people say we Chinese are yellow imperialists.” General laughter. I did not join in.
“What do you think?” they asked anxiously.
“Yes, I think you are imperialists,” I said.
All hell broke loose in the embassy as six Chinese tried to explain to this Englishman what imperialism really is.

“All right,” I said. “I’m not saying you necessarily have direct territorial ambitions in Ghana; but for your own interests you have supported a dictator against the will of the masses of his own people.”
There was silence until one of them said, “Yes, we got it wrong.”

Together we read a play called “Through the Garden Wall” by Peter Howard, an MRA author. It is an allegory of the Cold War, based on two neighbouring families who are at war with each other. One family is anti-faith, the other has a faith with no bearing on their lifestyle. With a strong element of humour and romance, the play points to a change of character on both sides. The Chinese enjoyed it, although they were as cynical about the factor of a change in human nature as any bourgeois westerner.

At Christmas I invited them to my home and showed them photographic slides of white and black people I knew in Kenya, who since the Mau-Mau period had found a way of working together. The Chinese stuck to their dialectic but could also say, “We cannot argue against the experience of your friends.” As I left Sudan, the Cultural Revolution was gathering pace in China, and I have often wondered how it affected those young diplomats.

Premier Chou En Lai arrives from China

NEW HALFA

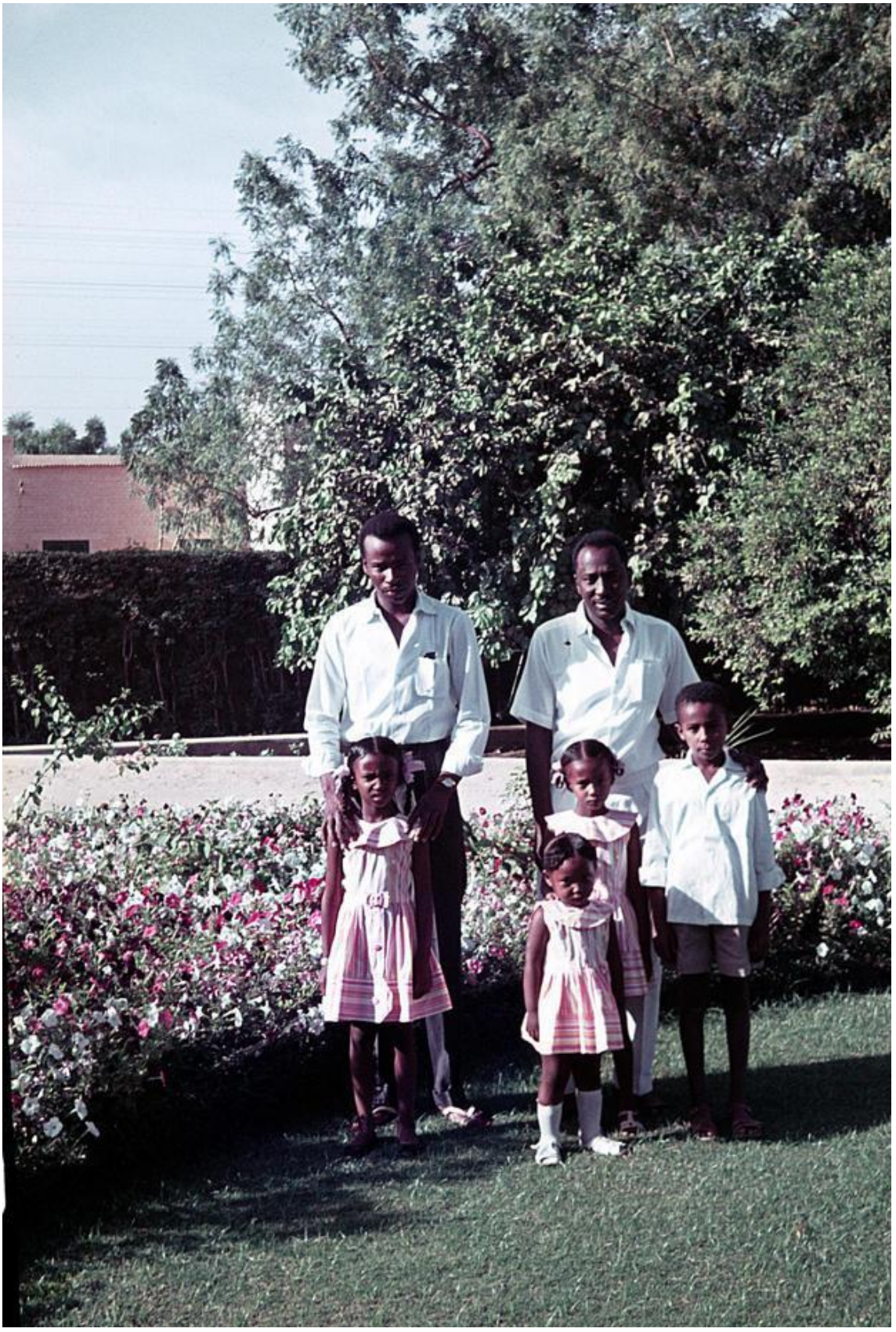
In April 1966, near the end of my eight years teaching, one of my HTTI students Ibrahim Kamel invited me to come with him on an Id visit to his relatives in East Sudan. I took the chance to visit New Halfa and wondered if I could find Idiya at the new Argin.

The new villages had been configured along the River Atbara in the same relation to each other as the originals in Nubia. Argin was now Village 22. Idiya did not know I was coming, but there was the same welcome and the same wisdom. One of his chickens was killed and cooked for lunch. We talked about the challenges the Nubians faced in their new homeland.

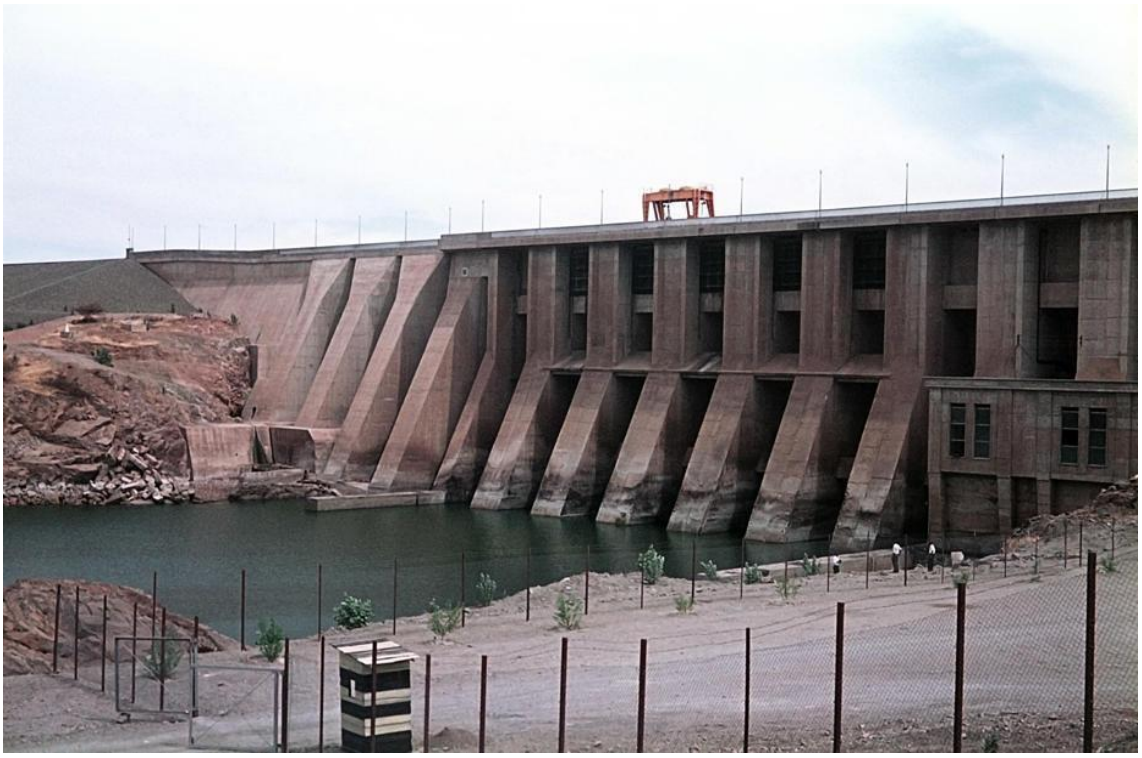
In Wadi Halfa it hardly ever rained, and by ancient tradition the women had trailed the hem of their black tobes on the ground. New Halfa was often muddy and they couldn't do that. New Halfa had an irrigation system which allowed increased crops of wheat and vegetables. The nomads of the region, complained Idiya, regarded this new cultivation as a gift of God for the grazing of their camels. We talked about how to deal with difficult people. "Ad-dunya kifah" as the Sudanese say. Life is a struggle.

Khartoum Bus arrives at New Halfa

Bridge over River Atbara



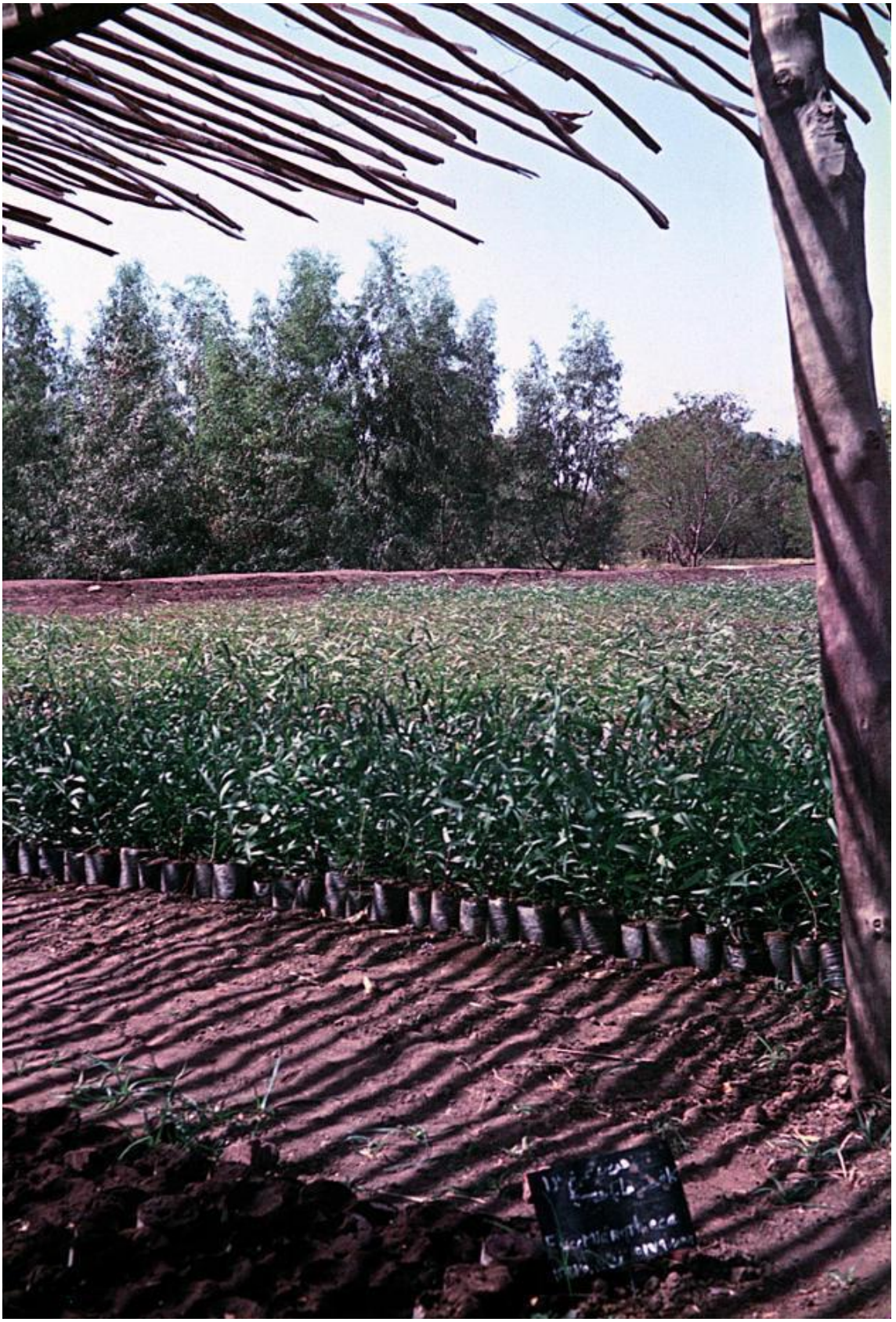
Ibrahim Kamel (left) with relatives



Dam at Khashm El Girba

Canal and sugar cane

Sugar factory



Tree cultivation

A New Halfa School

The Omda of Argin (right) in front of his village at New Halfa

THE QUEEN'S VISIT

Elizabeth the Second was crowned Queen in London on June 2nd 1953. I was one of thousands who spent the whole night before on the edge of a London pavement in the rain. We wanted the best possible view of the procession which would take her to Westminster Abbey. In the early morning hundreds of thousands more people arrived. The procession included rulers and military units from all over the Commonwealth and Empire. Afterwards I rushed to my parents' home 15 miles away to watch the ceremony in the Abbey on black-and-white television.

Anybody from another country who wants to understand the United Kingdom deeply should read the words of the Coronation. They come from a tradition which goes back over a thousand years. In essence Elizabeth gave her life to God afresh, and asked for his strength and wisdom to rule her people justly. This made her people part of a spiritual contract. Amid much that is wrong in our country, millions still take faith seriously. Today there is increasing respect by the majority for different traditions of faith and good will.

Twelve years after the Coronation, we British working in Sudan were proud and happy that Queen Elizabeth was coming on a state visit in February 1965. But in the weeks before the signs were not good.

The war in the South was getting worse, and the racial killings in Khartoum in December had shaken everybody. During the October uprising the authority of the police had weakened, and robbery was increasing. The Provisional Government was divided. Elections were scheduled for March. The socialist coalition was organising ever larger and noisier processions and rallies. And now the Mahdist party, the Umma, was bringing in thousands of their tribesmen from the West for rival demonstrations in the capital. There was fear that the two major groups would clash bloodily. Foreign buyers and investors were worried and the economy was slowing. British people, especially those with young families, were wondering if it was safe to stay.

It was the previous military Government that had invited Queen Elizabeth for a state visit. Were present conditions right for it? What would the world think if the visit was cancelled, and would that be good for Sudan? Finally the quarrelling factions agreed it should go ahead, and the demonstrations stopped. The Sudanese prepared for what they do better than anyone else in the world, looking after guests with immense generosity. The British Ambassador risked his career in recommending it was safe for the Queen to come.

The wheels of the Queen's plane touched down punctually at 12 noon. Hundreds of senior Sudanese officials at the airport all looked at their watches and applauded loudly. It was the first national event that had started on time in recent memory. The Queen and her husband Prince Philip emerged smiling, and a sense of baraka (blessing) pervaded the whole schedule. In Western Sudan, for instance, the tribal leaders assembled hundreds of horses and camels and their riders in a pageant of joyful disorder. The Queen loved it all. After she left the country, the process of elections went ahead in a peaceful spirit, and Sudan returned to democratic governance for the next four years.

Many of the British employed in Sudan at that time had discovered it was possible to love another country, not just our own. We realised there were some things to be ashamed

of from Britain's past. But the Sudanese also respected many of our countrymen for the good things they had pioneered. Now in the era of Independence a new kind of partnership was open to our country. Those of us who had arrived in our twenties were already marked for life by our experience of a fascinating country.

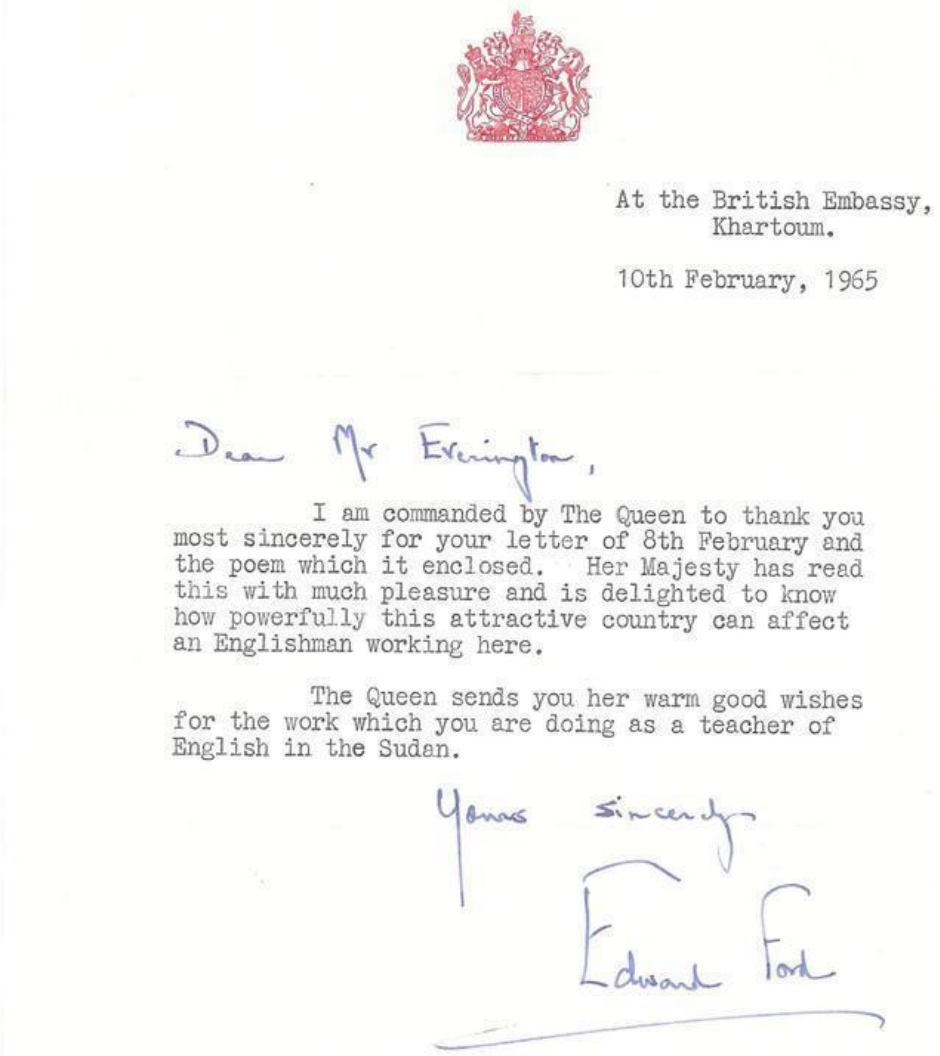
At the start of the Royal visit of 1965 I tried to express some of this in verse. I delivered it with a letter to the Queen at the British Embassy. Two days later a response came in a letter from her Private Secretary, Sir Edward Ford.

On February 10 1965 the poem was published in The Morning News, Khartoum. In verse two, ‘the fens’ refers to Cambridge, and ‘the dreaming spires’ to Oxford.

Queen Elizabeth arrives

British Ambassador Sir Ian Dixon Scott presents religious leaders to Queen Elizabeth.
Imam El Hadi El Mahdi is shaking hands. Sayed Mohammed Osman El Mirghani in foreground

Dr Tijani El Mahi, President of the Supreme Council, and Queen Elizabeth with schoolgirls



At the British Embassy,
Khartoum.

10th February, 1965

Dear Mr Everington,

I am commanded by The Queen to thank you most sincerely for your letter of 8th February and the poem which it enclosed. Her Majesty has read this with much pleasure and is delighted to know how powerfully this attractive country can affect an Englishman working here.

The Queen sends you her warm good wishes for the work which you are doing as a teacher of English in the Sudan.

Yours sincerely,

Edward Ford

P.J. Everington, Esq.

Letter from HM's Private Secretary in response to 'Pioneers and Partners' poem

PIONEERS AND PARTNERS

They came from the lochs and fells and downs
To rule a desert land
From Sussex farms and Yorkshire towns
For a lifework in Sudan,

Fresh from the fens and the dreaming spires
From First May Boats and Greats
From clinkered Cam to felucca'd Nile
To the drowsy minarets.

And the Bari knew a hospital
The Baggara knew a train
The Dongolawi knew a pump
And the Beja knew a crane.

The skill and sweat of the Delta
Built the rail and tamed the flood,
Preached freedom too and unity
For all of Arab blood,

While across the gaunt Gezira,
Midwife to a mighty plan,
The chequered canal brought forth white gold
From the new fertile feddan.

Who shall deny that mistakes were made,
Of vision none too wide,
Of a Congress snubbed, and districts closed,
Of patronage and pride?

Yet the men of the land gave sweat and blood
For a King across the sea
In war; then claimed in peace the right
To decide their own destiny.

In the majesty of a desert dawn
Set in a desert sky
The New Year sun rose up on the land
Like the crown of liberty.

Freedom! The fiercest light in the sky
The hardest gift God ever gave
That spotlights the selfish and withers the weak
But nurtures the kind and the brave.

Governments come and governments go
As a nation seeks for the right,

But in and through all is the need of needs:
Africa must unite,

Unite above race and class and creed
To bring free lands to birth,
Unite to banish hatred and greed,
Unite to unite the earth.

And what can they give those men from the fens,
Their wives and their children too?
Remains there a cause to draw them from home,
A task to be carried through?

They can come to learn; and there's much to learn
From the warmth of a Nuba smile.
From the courage and faith that can flow from the heart
Like the flood of the August Nile.

They can come to serve if they're wanted,
They can heal, teach, lecture, invest,
They can fly, plant forests, and market the gum,
Import and supply the best.

They can come to live the life of the free,
The life where there's nothing to hide,
The open heart and the open home,
Truth told without fear or pride.

Not in wistful memory of a past that is no more,
Not as cruel critics of a present oft unsure,
But (for we know our own land's need and our own scarred history)
As humble fellow citizens of a new world yet to be,

Where God can speak to the heart of a man
And nations obey the call,
Where the wealth of a wondrous earth can be shared
For the common use of all,

Where the white or black or brown of a skin
Knows only one blood inside,
Red, as the blood of One who lived
For all, and for all died.

I know not, Sudan, if I stay or I go
But I vow, having drunk of your waters,
In my English heart there is ever a place
For all your sons and daughters.

Sudan Airways leaving North Africa for London

“TO HONOUR EVERYONE WHO FORSOOK HOMELAND AND FAMILY”

In the name of God, the compassionate and merciful
Republican Decree No 359 in the year 1996
Award of The Order of The Two Niles
The President of the Republic

In cognizance of the seventh constitutional decision of the year 1993, and pursuant to the ruling of section 5 of the 1993 law relating to medals and decorations

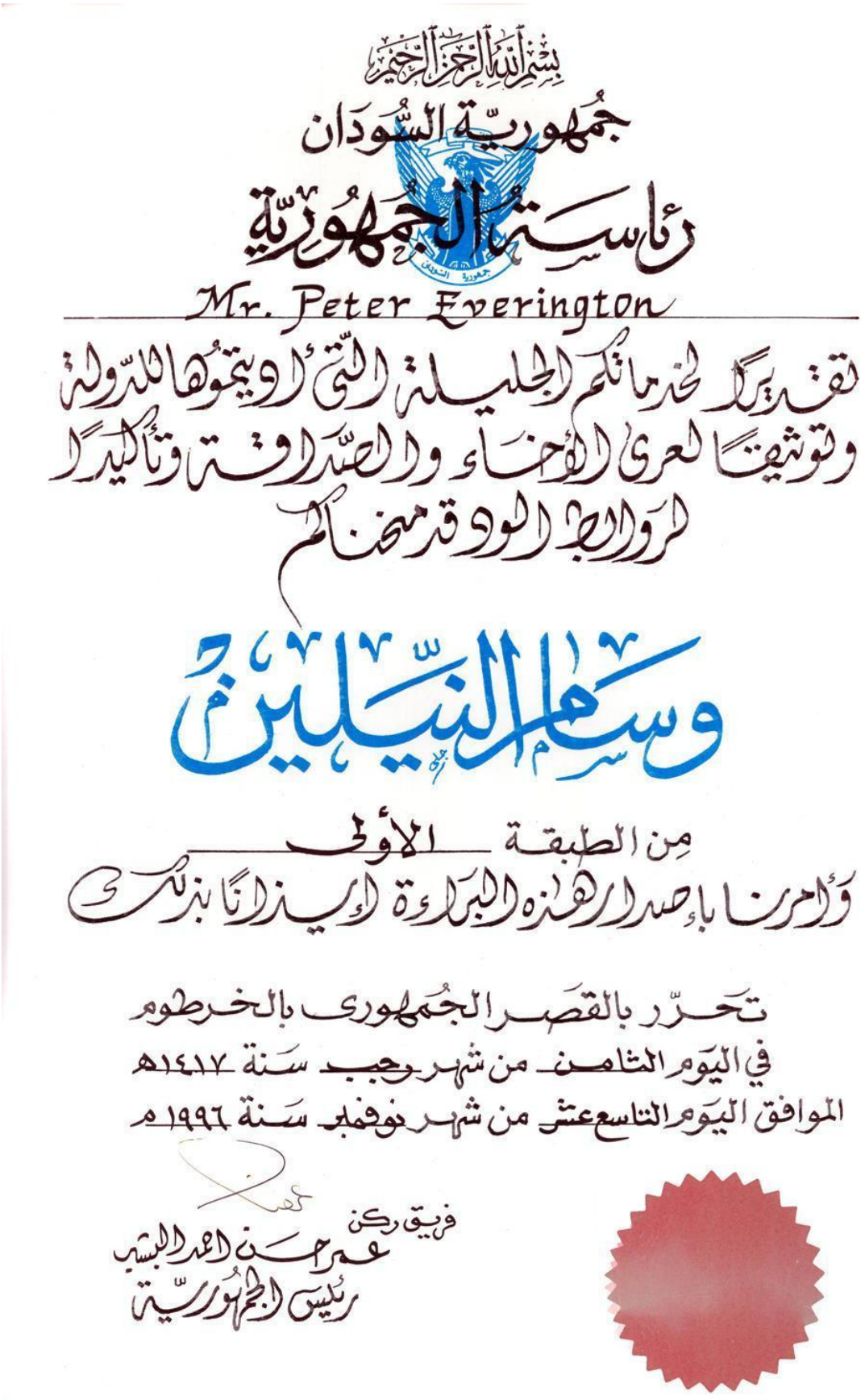
In appreciation of the outstanding services he rendered to Sudan in the realm of education, and to honour everyone who forsook homeland and family to enhance the dignity and development of the Sudanese people, and to put on record a brilliant period in the history of education in our country,

the following decree is issued:

1. The Order of the Two Niles, First Class, is awarded to Ustaz Peter Everington,
formerly a teacher of English at Khartoum Secondary School.
2. Issued under my signature on the eighth day of the month of Rajab in the

Hijra year 1417, corresponding to the nineteenth day of the month of
November in the Christian year 1996.

Lieutenant-General Omer Hassan Ahmed El Beshir
President of the Republic


بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

جمهورية السودان

رئاسة الجمهورية

Mr. Peter Everington

تقديرا لخدماتكم الجليلة التي أوليتموها للدولة
وتوثيقا لعرى الأخاء والصداقة وتأكيدا
لروابط الود قد منحناكم

وسام النيلين

من الطبقة الأولى

وأمرنا باصدار هذه البراءة إيذانا بذلك

تحرر بالقصر الجمهوري بالخرطوم
في اليوم الثامن من شهر رجب سنة ١٤١٧هـ
الموافق اليوم التاسع عشر من شهر نوفمبر سنة ١٩٩٦م

فريق ركن
عمر حسن احمد البشير
رئيس الجمهورية

Certificate of The Order of The Two Niles, First Class