

THE PARTITION OF AFRICA

CHAPTER I

THE AFRICA OF THE ANCIENTS

Antiquity of African civilisation—America—Australia—The Egyptians—Phœnicians and Carthaginians—Ophir—Arabs on the East Coast—Carthaginians on the West Coast—Phœnician knowledge of Africa—Relations with the interior—The first Greek settlements—Hecataeus—Herodotus—The Nasamonean youths—Enterprise under the Ptolemies—Eratosthenes—Ptolemy's map—Roman enterprise—*The Periplus*—Ptolemy's knowledge of Africa—Nile exploration under Nero.

WE have been witnesses of one of the most remarkable episodes in the history of the world. During the past ten years we have seen the bulk of the one barbarous continent parcelled out among the most civilised Powers of Europe. That continent is no recent discovery. It is not a new world like America or Australia. It enters into the oldest traditions and the most ancient history. While yet Europe was the home of wandering barbarians, long before Abraham left his father's fields or the Phœnicians had settled on the Syrian coast, one of the most wonderful civilisations on record had begun to work out its destiny on the banks of that Nile, the

Antiquity
of African
civilisa-
tion.

mystery of whose source, so long sought for, has been solved only within our own time. It does not enter into the scope of this work to discuss the origin or trace the history of Egypt ; it is enough for us that the continent on which the oldest, or, at least, one of the oldest, civilisations was born and was developed through thousands of years is even now less known than a continent discovered 400 years ago, and has only during the past few years been taken seriously in hand by the peoples who have the making of the world's commerce and the world's history.

Let us, by way of contrast, glance briefly at what has happened with respect to America and Australia.

America.

Four hundred years ago Columbus stumbled upon a new world with a land area of 16,000,000 square miles, about five times the size of Europe. With the exception of fringes of undeveloped civilisations, the secret of whose origin we have not yet fathomed, the American continent was given over to barbarians ; it is doubtful if its total population exceeded 4,000,000 ; the population of North America was probably not much more than half a million. In the 400 years that have elapsed since this momentous discovery, the feeble indigenous civilisations have disappeared, the copper-coloured barbarians have been driven into recesses, exterminated, or reduced to complete subjection ; and over the face of the Continent have spread some 130,000,000 of people of European origin or descent. In the United States alone, covering about the same area as Europe, there are probably now about 60,000,000 of white people, and in Canada another 4,000,000. All

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the arts and industries and cultures of the highest civilisation flourish on the American continent as they do in Europe. Agriculture, manufactures, commerce, are advancing with giant strides. The trade of the United States is about the same in value as that of Germany or that of France. In less than another century the New World may be running a neck-and-neck race with the Old along every line of progress.

It is little more than a century since the first con- Australia. vict settlement was established in New South Wales. It is only about half a century since Australia may be said to have had a free hand. In size it is somewhat less than Canada or Europe. When it was discovered it is doubtful if the native population amounted to more than half a million, belonging to the lowest type of humanity. The country was absolutely virgin soil; the conditions were much less favourable than in America. In the brief period during which Europe has been in touch with Australia, the half million savages have given way to over 3,000,000 whites, mostly of British origin; and these 3,000,000 have so far developed the resources of the Continent that the total trade amounts to about £120,000,000 sterling annually. Such is the progress that has been made in two continents; one discovered only 400 years ago, the other practically untouched by Europe until about a century ago.

Let us now briefly trace the efforts made to appro- The Egyp-
tians. priate the African continent by those whose interests and enterprise have extended beyond their own homes.

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We do not venture to account for the origin of the Egyptians or of their civilisation. Whether the civilisation of Egypt was of purely indigenous growth, or whether its germs were introduced from the outside, does not concern our present purpose.

Were the Egyptians the first to begin the partition of Africa from the outside? That depends on what we mean by partition. Ages before the seed of Egyptian civilisation was sown, humanity had begun to pour in from Asia, and the north coast of Africa must have been peopled by a race which formed the basis of the Berber population of the present day. But these were wandering barbarians, just as were the pigmies, the Zulus, the Hottentots, farther south. The portion of Africa on which the Egyptians flourished for ages was even to a late period regarded as a part of Arabia. The Egyptians are not generally credited with being great navigators till the time of the Ptolemies, but there has recently been found on the monuments the record of a great national expedition sent down the Red Sea by a queen of the period, about the year 1200 B.C. Its destination was the country of Punt, about the situation of which there is even more doubt than there is about that of Ophir. Except along the coast-land of the Mediterranean, the knowledge of Africa westwards, possessed by the Egyptians, was, until a comparatively recent period probably bounded by the Nile Valley. How far south their knowledge extended it is impossible precisely to say. Very early in their history as early, probably, as 2000 B.C., they had dealings with

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Ethiopia (the country generally lying south of Egypt proper, including Nubia, Northern Abyssinia, and possibly Kordofan), and so their knowledge of the river may have extended as far as the site of Khartum, though even that is doubtful. It may be said that an enterprising people like the Egyptians, who carried their arms far and wide, who must have had an extensive trade with the peoples dwelling along the Nile, and who in all probability were regularly supplied with slaves from the interior, must have had some knowledge, even if only based on rumour, of the sources of the great river on which their very existence depended. Possibly they may; but if so, that knowledge never found record; or if it did, the record has been lost. It is just as probable that they remained till the time of the Phœnicians, Carthaginians, and Greeks in complete ignorance of all that lay beyond the latitude of Ethiopia. Let us realise how vague were the notions of both the Greeks and the Romans of Central and Northern Europe, and of Asia beyond India and Persia. For untold ages the Old World knew nothing of the New. Only half a century ago the map of Central Africa was for Europeans, so far as anything like even approximately accurate knowledge goes, a blank from 10° north latitude to the confines of the Cape Colony. It is about thirty years since we obtained any certain knowledge of those great lakes which from an early period were rumoured to exist in the centre of the Continent. It is only sixteen years since the course of Africa's greatest river was traced out by Mr. Stanley.

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If, then, 400 years after the discovery of a new Continent, with all the intense eagerness of the modern world for increasing knowledge, with half a dozen great nations representing some 200,000,000 of the most advanced peoples of the earth keenly competing in the exploration of the world and in the acquisition of wealth and of power, we are still ignorant of great areas in Central Africa, need we be surprised that the Egyptians and other nations of antiquity, with wants insignificant compared with ours, with a total population, "all told," scarcely equal to that of one of our great states, with all Europe and all Asia before them where to choose, should leave the torrid, impenetrable, unproductive continent and its savages alone, taking from it only what could be conveniently reached from trading stations on the coast, or through the navigable channel of the Nile? Nor should it be forgotten that the camel is a comparatively modern introduction into Africa, and both the ox and the horse would be but poor substitutes for it in traversing the Sahara, the most formidable barrier to the penetration of Central Africa from the north. Moreover, it should be remembered that Egypt, especially in the height of her greatness, was, on the whole, more concerned with Asia than with Africa; indeed, as we have seen, up to a comparatively late period, Egypt, east of the Nile, was regarded as part of Arabia.

Phoenicians
and Cartha-
ginians.

The Phoenicians and Carthaginians did far more to extend the knowledge of Africa than did the Egyptians; and it may have been from them that Homer and Hesiod derived their knowledge of the Mediterranean coast. Thebes was about the limit of Homer's

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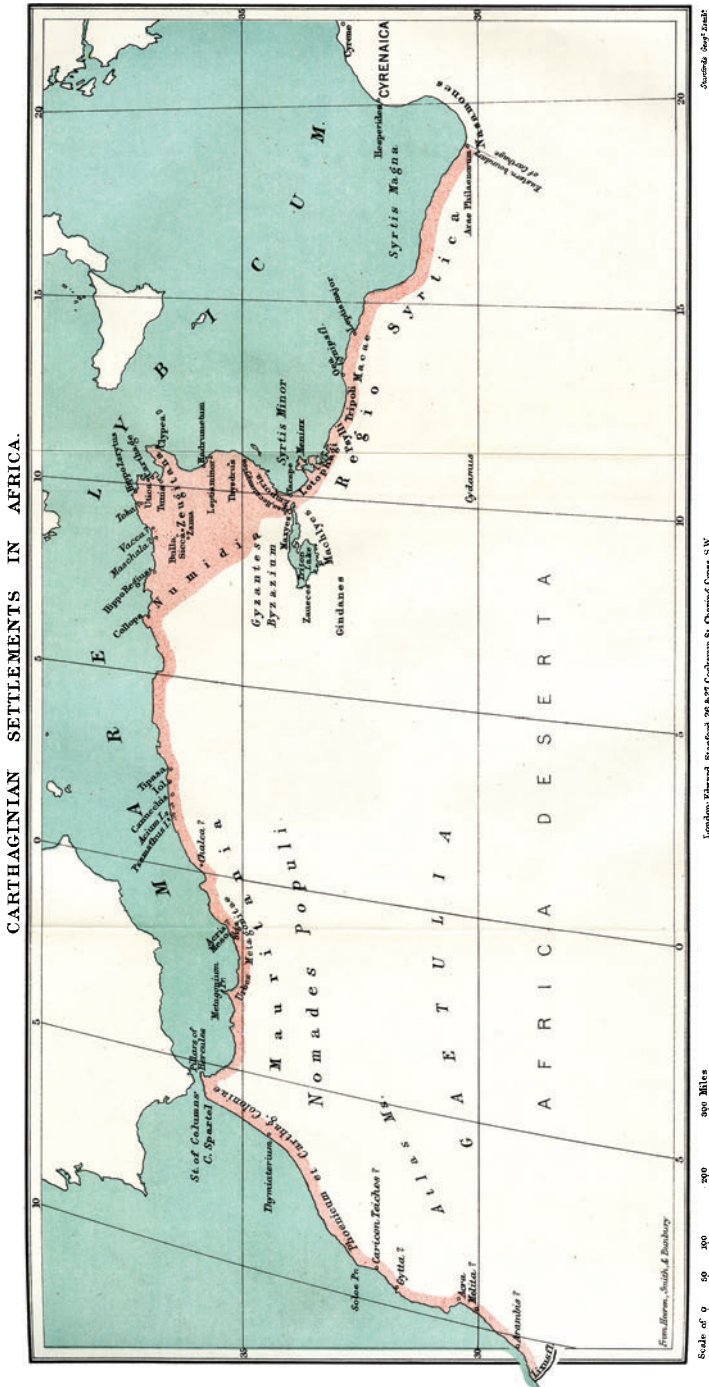
knowledge of Africa on the south, though he had heard of the Ethiopians and the pigmies, who thus figure on the map of Africa from a very remote period ; they are, probably, the remnants of the aboriginal population. But it would be a mistake to attribute much reality to Homer's geography, though, perhaps, it fairly indicated the knowledge which in his time existed among his countrymen.

The Egyptians themselves, as has been stated, were not great navigators ; indeed, they seem not to have possessed a fleet of any importance till the time of the Ptolemies. Ptolemy Philadelphus maintained two powerful fleets in the Mediterranean and Red Sea. But long before this the Phœnicians had appeared in the Mediterranean, and soon achieved a position as traders, navigators, and colonisers unequalled by any people of ancient times except perhaps the Arabians. Doubtless their example stimulated the Egyptians to more enterprise as navigators, but for a long period we know the Phœnicians had almost a monopoly of the carrying trade of the Mediterranean world, and their sailors were in demand for the ships of other nations. About their connection with Africa there is no doubt. They were probably not the first of the Semitic family to settle in North Africa ; Hamites, at least, there were in plenty. The Egyptians themselves were possibly largely of this type, as was the population along the Mediterranean coast of Africa. Utica, perhaps the earliest Phœnician (Syrian) colony in Africa, was founded about 1100 B.C., even before Gades (Tarshish), on the coast of Spain, and 280 years before Carthage, a few miles distant

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on the same Tunisian coast. Before Carthage was founded, Utica had established stations or trading factories along the Mediterranean coast of Africa, and down the Atlantic coast. Syrian colonies were thickly planted as far as the mouth of the river now known as the Draa, to the south of Morocco, and thence, it is believed, there were caravan routes to the country of the Blacks. Their trading stations or factories were no doubt very similar to those which at a later period were planted by Portuguese, English, French, and Dutch along the coast of Central Africa, to which native traders brought the products of the interior in exchange for goods of European origin. Carthage, as it grew in power, also, like Utica, established its stations west and south along the African coast. Many of these settlements were more than mere trading stations. Cultivation of various kinds was carried on, and from the African coast of the Mediterranean corn was exported in large quantities.

We have pretty certain information as to the knowledge which the Carthaginians had of the African west coast, but considerable doubt exists as to how far the Phœnicians were in the habit of voyaging down the east coast of the Continent. The story of the circumnavigation of the Continent by Phœnicians in the time of King Necho, about 610 B.C., has often been told. So far as the *data* go, that a Phœnician expedition starting from the Red Sea sailed down the east coast, round the south coast, and north by the west coast to the Pillars of Hercules and on to Egypt, there is no difficulty in crediting the story. At that period the



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Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-07203-8 - The Partition of Africa
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