

Section of homestead and kraal (Eastern Gaajok)

THE NUER

A DESCRIPTION OF
THE MODES OF LIVELIHOOD AND
POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS OF
A NILOTIC PEOPLE

BY

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INTRODUCTORY

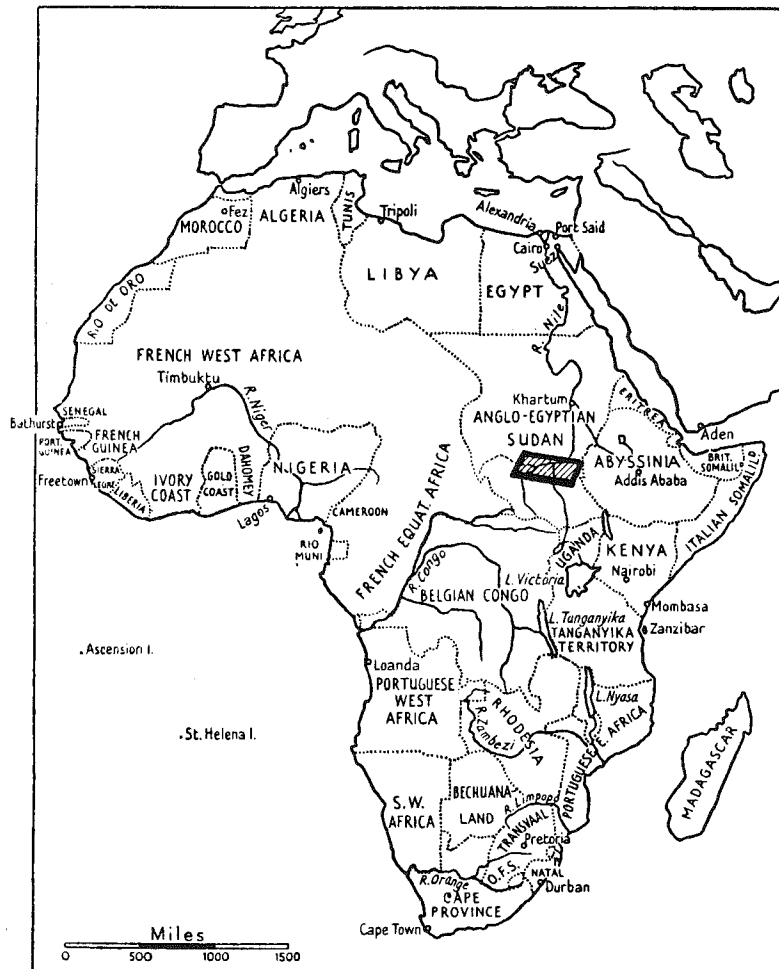
I

FROM 1840, when Werne, Arnaud, and Thibaut made their ill-assorted voyage, to 1881, when the successful revolt of the Mahdi Muhammad Ahmed closed the Sudan to further exploration, several travellers penetrated Nuerland by one or other of the three great rivers that traverse it: the Bahr el Jebel (with the Bahr el Zeraf), the Bahr el Ghazal, and the Sobat. I have not been able to make much use of their writings, however, for their contact with the Nuer was slight and the impressions they recorded were superficial, and sometimes spurious. The most accurate and the least pretentious account is by the Savoyard elephant-hunter Jules Poncet, who spent several years on the borders of Nuerland.¹

A later source of information about the Nuer are the *Sudan Intelligence Reports* which run from the reconquest of the Sudan in 1899 to the present day, their ethnological value decreasing in recent years. In the first two decades after the reconquest there are a few reports by military officers which contain interesting, and often shrewd, observations.² The publication of *Sudan Notes and Records*, commencing in 1918, provided a new medium for recording observations on the customs of the peoples of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, and several political officers contributed papers on the Nuer. Two of these officers were killed in the performance of their duty, Major C. H. Stigand by the Aliab Dinka in 1919 and Captain V. H. Fergusson by the Nuong Nuer in 1927. In the same journal appeared the

¹ Some of the writings from which I have derived information are Ferdinand Werne, *Expedition zur Entdeckung der Quellen des Weissen Nil* (1840-1), 1848; Hadji-Abd-el-Hamid Bey (C. L. du Couret), *Voyage au Pays des Niam-Niams ou Hommes à Queue*, 1854; Brun-Rollet, *Le Nil Blanc et le Soudan*, 1855; G. Lejean, *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie*, Paris, 1860; Jules Poncet, *Le Fleuve Blanc (Extrait des Nouvelles Annales de Voyages)*, 1863-4; Mr. and Mrs. J. Petherick, *Travels in Central Africa*, 1869; Ernst Marno, *Reisen im Gebiete des blauen und weissen Nil, im ägyptischen Sudan und den angrenzenden Negerländern, in den Jahren 1869 bis 1873, 1874*. Others are mentioned later, particularly on pp. 126-7 and 134.

² These reports were used by Lieut.-Colonel Count Gleichen in his compilation: *The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*, 2 vols., 1905.



Map showing approximate area (shaded) occupied by the Nuer.

first attempt, by Mr. H. C. Jackson, to write a comprehensive account of the Nuer, and great credit is due to him for the manner in which, in spite of serious obstacles, he carried it out.¹

After I had begun my researches a book by Miss Ray Huffman, of the American Mission, and some papers by Father J. P. Crazzolaro, of the Congregation of Verona, were published.² Although my own contributions to various journals are reprinted, in a condensed form, in this book, or will be reprinted in a subsequent volume, I allude to them here so that the reader may have a complete bibliography. I have omitted much detail that appeared in these articles.³

Lists of a few Nuer words were compiled by Brun-Rollet and Marno. More detailed vocabularies have been written by Major Stigand and Miss Huffman, and grammars by Professor Westermann and Father Crazzolaro. Professor Westermann's paper contains also some ethnological material.⁴

¹ Major C. H. Stigand, 'Warrior Classes of the Nuers', *S. N. & R.*, 1918, pp. 116-18, and 'The Story of Kir and the White Spear', *ibid.*, 1919, pp. 224-6; Capt. V. H. Fergusson, 'The Nuong Nuer', *ibid.*, 1921, pp. 146-55, and 'Nuer Beast Tales', *ibid.*, 1924, pp. 105-12; H. C. Jackson, 'The Nuer of the Upper Nile Province', *ibid.*, 1923, pp. 59-107 and 123-89 (this paper was reprinted as a book under the same title by El Hadara Printing Press, Khartoum, no date, and contained a terminal essay of 23 pages by P. Coriat on 'The Gaweir Nuers').

² Ray Huffman, *Nuer Customs and Folk-lore*, 1931, 105 pp.; Father J. P. Crazzolaro, 'Die Gar-Zeremonie bei den Nuer', *Africa*, 1932, pp. 28-39, and 'Die Bedeutung des Rindes bei den Nuer', *ibid.*, 1934, pp. 300-20.

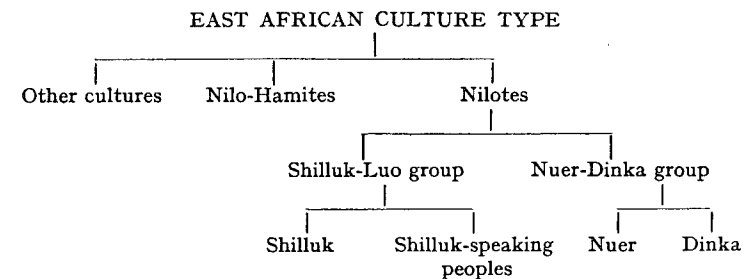
³ E. E. Evans-Pritchard, 'The Nuer, Tribe and Clan', *S. N. & R.*, 1933, pp. 1-53, 1934, pp. 1-57, and 1935, pp. 37-87; 'The Nuer, Age-Sets', *ibid.*, 1936, pp. 233-69; 'Economic Life of the Nuer', *ibid.*, 1937, pp. 209-45, and 1938, pp. 31-77; 'Customs Relating to Twins among the Nilotic Nuer', *Uganda Journal*, 1936, pp. 230-8; 'Daily Life of the Nuer in Dry Season Camps', *Custom is King, A Collection of Essays in Honour of R. R. Marett*, 1936, pp. 291-9; 'Some Aspects of Marriage and the Family among the Nuer', *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Rechtswissenschaft*, 1938, pp. 306-92; 'Nuer Time-Reckoning', *Africa*, 1939, pp. 189-216. The chapter on the Nuer (Chap. VI) in *Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan*, by Prof. C. G. and Mrs. B. Z. Seligman, 1932, was compiled from my notebooks.

⁴ Brun-Rollet, 'Vokabularien der Dinka-, Nuehr- und Shilluk-Sprachen', *Petermann's Mittheilungen, Erg. II.* 1862-3, pp. 25-30; Marno, 'Kleine Vocabularien der Fungi-, Tabi-, Bertat- und Nuehr-Sprache', *Reisen im Gebiete des blauen und weissen Nil*, 1874, pp. 481-95; Professor Diedrich Westermann, 'The Nuer Language', *Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen*, 1912, pp. 84-141; Major C. H. Stigand, *A Nuer-English Vocabulary*, 1923, 33 pp.; Ray Huffman, *Nuer-English Dictionary*, 1929, 63 pp., and *English-Nuer Dictionary*, 1931, 80 pp.; Father J. P. Crazzolaro, *Outlines of a Nuer Grammar*, 1933, 218 pp.

II

I describe in this volume the ways in which a Nilotic people obtain their livelihood, and their political institutions. The information I collected about their domestic life will be published in a second volume.

The Nuer,¹ who call themselves *Nath* (sing. *ran*), are round about 200,000 souls and live in the swamps and open savannah that stretch on both sides of the Nile south of its junction with the Sobat and Bahr el Ghazal, and on both banks of these two tributaries. They are tall, long-limbed, and narrow-headed, as may be seen in the illustrations. Culturally they are similar to the Dinka, and the two peoples together form a subdivision of the Nilotic group, which occupies part of an East-African culture-area the characteristics and extent of which are at present ill-defined. A second Nilotic subdivision comprises the Shilluk and various peoples who speak languages similar to Shilluk (Luo, Anuak, Lango, &c.). Probably these Shilluk-speaking peoples are all more alike to one another than any one of them is to the Shilluk, though little is yet known about most of them. A tentative classification may be thus presented:



Nuer and Dinka are too much alike physically and their languages and customs are too similar for any doubt to arise about their common origin, though the history of their divergence is unknown. The problem is complicated: for example, the Atwot, to the west of the Nile, appear to be a Nuer tribe who have adopted many Dinka habits,² while the Jikany tribes of

¹ The word 'Nuer' is sanctioned by a century of usage. It is probably of Dinka origin. I use it in singular and plural, speaking of 'a Nuer man' and of 'the Nuer people'.

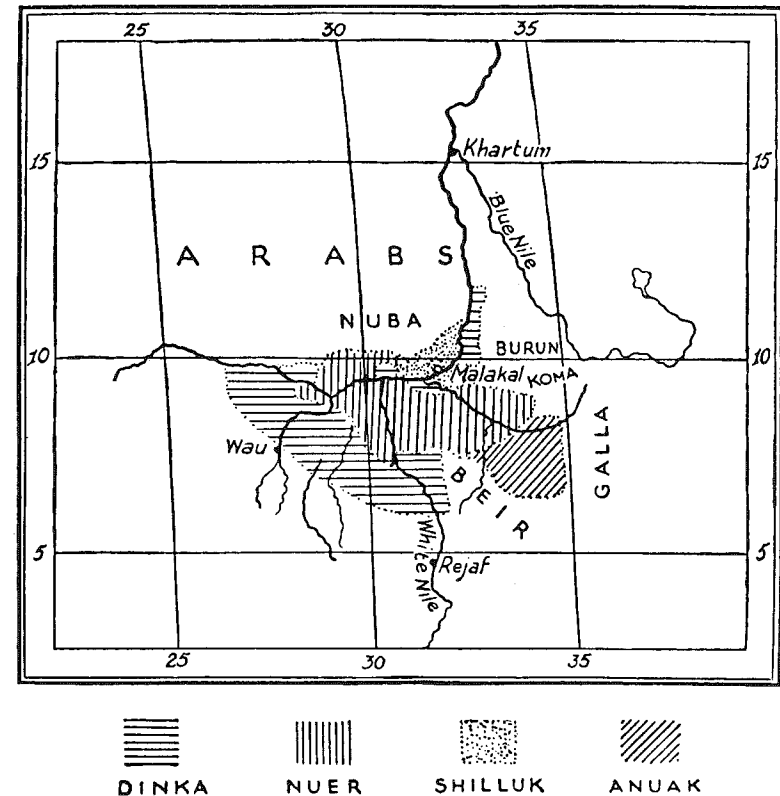
² Poncet, *op. cit.*, p. 54. They appear as Atot in the map on p. 129.

Nuerland are said to be of Dinka origin. Moreover, there has been continuous contact between the two peoples that has resulted in much miscegenation and cultural borrowing. Both peoples recognize their common origin.

When we possess more information about some of the Shilluk-speaking peoples it will be possible to state what are the defining characters of Nilotic culture and social structure. At present such a classification is exceedingly difficult and I postpone the attempt, devoting this book to a plain account of the Nuer and neglecting the many obvious comparisons that might be made with other Nilotic peoples.

Political institutions are its main theme, but they cannot be understood without taking into account environment and modes of livelihood. I therefore devote the earlier part of the book to a description of the country in which the Nuer live and of how they obtain the necessities of life. It will be seen that the Nuer political system is consistent with their oecology.

The groups chiefly dealt with in the later part of the book are the people, the tribe and its segments, the clan and its lineages, and the age-sets. Each of these groups is, or forms part of, a segmentary system, by reference to which it is defined, and, consequently the status of its members, when acting as such towards one another and to outsiders, is undifferentiated. These statements will be elucidated in the course of our inquiry. We first describe the interrelation of territorial segments within a territorial, or political, system and then the relation of other social systems to this system. What we understand by political structure will be evident as we proceed, but we may state as an initial definition that we refer to relations within a territorial system between groups of persons who live in spatially well-defined areas and are conscious of their identity and exclusiveness. Only in the smallest of these communities are their members in constant contact with one another. We distinguish these political groups from local groups of a different kind, namely domestic groups, the family, the household, and the joint family, which are not, and do not form part of, segmentary systems, and in which the status of members in respect to each other and to outsiders is differentiated. Social ties in domestic groups are primarily of a kinship order, and corporate life is normal.



The Nuer and neighbouring peoples



Youth (Eastern Gaajok) fastening giraffe-hair necklace on friend

The Nuer political system includes all the peoples with whom they come into contact. By 'people' we mean all persons who speak the same language and have, in other respects, the same culture, and consider themselves to be distinct from like aggregates. The Nuer, the Shilluk, and the Anuak each occupy a continuous territory, but a people may be distributed in widely separate areas, e.g. the Dinka. When a people is, like the Shilluk, politically centralized, we may speak of a 'nation'. The Nuer and Dinka, on the other hand, are divided into a number of tribes which have no common organization or central administration and these peoples may be said to be, politically, a congeries of tribes, which sometimes form loose federations. The Nuer differentiate those tribes which live in the homeland to the west of the Nile from those which have migrated to the east of it. We find it convenient to make the same distinction and to speak of the Western Nuer and the Eastern Nuer. The Eastern Nuer may be further divided, for descriptive purposes, into those tribes which live near the Zeraf river and those which live to north and south of the Sobat river.

The largest political segment among the Nuer is the tribe. There is no larger group who, besides recognizing themselves as a distinct local community, affirm their obligation to combine in warfare against outsiders and acknowledge the rights of their members to compensation for injury. A tribe is divided into a number of territorial segments and these are more than mere geographical divisions, for the members of each consider themselves to be distinct communities and sometimes act as such. We call the largest tribal segments 'primary sections', the segments of a primary section 'secondary sections', and the segments of a secondary section 'tertiary sections'. A tertiary tribal section consists of a number of villages which are the smallest political units of Nuerland. A village is made up of domestic groups, occupying hamlets, homesteads, and huts.

We discuss the institution of the feud and the part played in it by the leopard-skin chief in relation to the political system. The word 'chief' may be a misleading designation, but it is sufficiently vague to be retained in the absence of a more suitable English word. He is a sacred person without political authority. Indeed, the Nuer have no government, and their

state might be described as an ordered anarchy. Likewise they lack law, if we understand by this term judgements delivered by an independent and impartial authority which has, also, power to enforce its decisions. There are signs that certain changes were taking place in this respect, and at the end of the chapter on the political system we describe the emergence of prophets, persons in whom dwell the spirits of Sky-gods, and we suggest that in them we may perceive the beginnings of political development. Leopard-skin chiefs and prophets are the only ritual specialists who, in our opinion, have any political importance.

After an examination of the political structure we describe the lineage system and discuss the relation between the two. Nuer lineages are agnatic, i.e. they consist of persons who trace their descent exclusively through males to a common ancestor. The clan is the largest group of lineages which is definable by reference to rules of exogamy, though agnatic relationship is recognized between several clans. A clan is segmented into lineages, which are diverging branches of descent from a common ancestor. We call the largest segments into which a clan is divided its 'maximal lineages', the segments of a maximal lineage its 'major lineages', the segments of a major lineage its 'minor lineages', and the segments of a minor lineage its 'minimal lineages'. The minimal lineage is the one to which a man usually refers when asked what is his lineage. A lineage is thus a group of agnates, dead or alive, between whom kinship can be traced genealogically, and a clan is an exogamous system of lineages. These lineage groups differ from political groups in that the relationship of their members to one another is based on descent and not on residence, for lineages are dispersed and do not compose exclusive local communities, and, also, in that lineage values often operate in a different range of situations from political values.

After discussing the lineage system in its relation to territorial segmentation we describe briefly the age-set system. The adult male population falls into stratified groups based on age, and we call these groups 'age-sets'. The members of each set become such by initiation and they remain in it till death. The sets do not form a cycle, but a progressive system, the junior set

passing through positions of relative seniority till it becomes the senior set, after which its members die and the set becomes a memory, since its name does not recur. The only significant age-grades are those of boyhood and manhood, so that once a lad has been initiated into a set he remains in the same age-grade for the rest of his life. There are no grades of warriors and elders such as are found in other parts of East Africa. Though the sets are conscious of their social identity they have no corporate functions. The members of a set may act jointly in a small locality, but the whole group never co-operates exclusively in any activity. Nevertheless, the system is organized tribally and each tribe is stratified according to age independently of other tribes, though adjacent tribes may co-ordinate their age-sets.

The Nuer, like all other peoples, are also socially differentiated according to sex. This dichotomy has a very limited, and negative, significance for the structural relations which form the subject of this book. Its importance is domestic rather than political and little attention is paid to it. The Nuer cannot be said to be stratified into classes. Within a tribe there is slight differentiation of status between members of a dominant clan, Nuer of other clans, and Dinka who have been incorporated into the tribe, but, except perhaps on the periphery of Nuer expansion eastwards, this constitutes distinction of categories rather than of ranks.

Such, briefly, is the plan of this book and such are the meanings we attach to the words most frequently used to describe the groups discussed in it. We hope in the course of our inquiry to refine these definitions. The inquiry is directed to two ends: to describe the life of the Nuer, and to lay bare some of the principles of their social structure. We have endeavoured to give as concise an account of their life as possible, believing that a short book is of greater value to the student and administrator than a long one, and, omitting much material, we have recorded only what is significant for the limited subject of discussion.

III

When the Government of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan asked me to make a study of the Nuer I accepted after hesitation and with misgivings. I was anxious to complete my study of the

Azande before embarking on a new task. I also knew that a study of the Nuer would be extremely difficult. Their country and character are alike intractable and what little I had previously seen of them convinced me that I would fail to establish friendly relations with them.

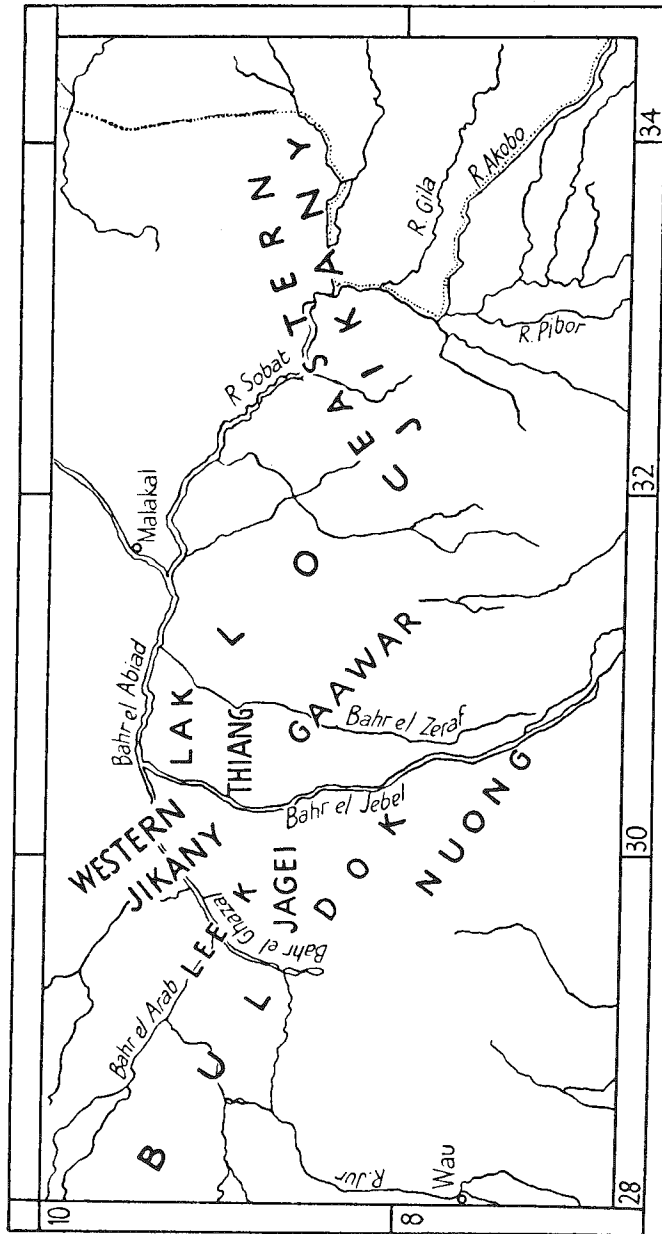
I have always considered, and still consider, that an adequate sociological study of the Nuer was impossible in the circumstances in which most of my work was done. The reader must judge what I have accomplished. I would ask him not to judge too harshly, for if my account is sometimes scanty and uneven I would urge that the investigation was carried out in adverse circumstances; that Nuer social organization is simple and their culture bare; and that what I describe is almost entirely based on direct observation and is not augmented by copious notes taken down from regular informants, of whom, indeed, I had none. I, unlike most readers, know the Nuer, and must judge my work more severely than they, and I can say that if this book reveals many insufficiencies I am amazed that it has ever appeared at all. A man must judge his labours by the obstacles he has overcome and the hardships he has endured, and by these standards I am not ashamed of the results.

It may interest readers if I give them a short description of the conditions in which I pursued my studies, for they will then be better able to decide which statements are likely to be based on sound observation and which to be less well-grounded.

I arrived in Nuerland early in 1930. Stormy weather prevented my luggage from joining me at Marseilles, and owing to errors, for which I was not responsible, my food stores were not forwarded from Malakal and my Zande servants were not instructed to meet me. I proceeded to Nuerland (Leek country) with my tent, some equipment, and a few stores bought at Malakal, and two servants, an Atwot and a Bellanda, picked up hastily at the same place.

When I landed at Yoahnyang¹ on the Bahr el Ghazal the Catholic missionaries there showed me much kindness. I waited

¹ I take this early opportunity to inform readers that I have not spelt Nuer names and other words with phonetic consistency. I raise no objection, therefore, to any one spelling them differently. Generally I have given the nominative form, but an occasional genitive has crept into the text, diagrams, and maps.



Sketch-map showing the larger Nuer tribes.

for nine days on the river bank for the carriers I had been promised. By the tenth day only four of them had arrived and if it had not been for the assistance of an Arab merchant, who recruited some local women, I might have been delayed for an indefinite period.

On the following morning I set out for the neighbouring village of Pakur, where my carriers dropped tent and stores in the centre of a treeless plain, near some homesteads, and refused to bear them to the shade about half a mile further. Next day was devoted to erecting my tent and trying to persuade the Nuer, through my Atwot servant who spoke Nuer and some Arabic, to remove my abode to the vicinity of shade and water, which they refused to do. Fortunately a youth, Nhial, who has since been my constant companion in Nuerland, attached himself to me and after twelve days persuaded his kinsmen to carry my goods to the edge of the forest where they lived.

My servants, who, like most natives of the Southern Sudan, were terrified of the Nuer, had by this time become so scared that after several sleepless and apprehensive nights they bolted to the river to await the next steamer to Malakal, and I was left alone with Nhial. During this time the local Nuer would not lend a hand to assist me in anything and they only visited me to ask for tobacco, expressing displeasure when it was denied them. When I shot game to feed myself and my Zande servants, who had at last arrived, they took the animals and ate them in the bush, answering my remonstrances with the rejoinder that since the beasts had been killed on their land they had a right to them.

My main difficulty at this early stage was inability to converse freely with the Nuer. I had no interpreter. None of the Nuer spoke Arabic. There was no adequate grammar of the language and, apart from three short Nuer-English vocabularies, no dictionary. Consequently the whole of my first and a large part of my second expedition were taken up with trying to master the language sufficiently to make inquiries through it, and only those who have tried to learn a very difficult tongue without the aid of an interpreter and adequate literary guidance will fully appreciate the magnitude of the task.

After leaving Leek country I went with Nhial and my two

Zande servants to Lou country. We motored to Muot dit with the intention of residing by the side of its lake, but found it entirely deserted, for it was too early for the annual concentration there. When some Nuer were found they refused to divulge the whereabouts of nearby camps and it was with considerable difficulty that we located one. We pitched our tents there and when the campers retired on Muot dit we accompanied them.

My days at Muot dit were happy and remunerative. I made friends with many Nuer youths who endeavoured to teach me their language and to show me that if I was a stranger they did not regard me as an obnoxious one. Every day I spent hours fishing with these lads in the lake and conversing with them in my tent. I began to feel my confidence returning and would have remained at Muot dit had the political situation been more favourable. A Government force surrounded our camp one morning at sunrise, searched for two prophets who had been leaders in a recent revolt, took hostages, and threatened to take many more if the prophets were not handed over. I felt that I was in an equivocal position, since such incidents might recur, and shortly afterwards returned to my home in Zandeland, having accomplished only three and a half months' work among the Nuer.

It would at any time have been difficult to do research among the Nuer, and at the period of my visit they were unusually hostile, for their recent defeat by Government forces and the measures taken to ensure their final submission had occasioned deep resentment. Nuer have often remarked to me, 'You raid us, yet you say we cannot raid the Dinka'; 'You overcame us with firearms and we had only spears. If we had had firearms we would have routed you'; and so forth. When I entered a cattle camp it was not only as a stranger but as an enemy, and they seldom tried to conceal their disgust at my presence, refusing to answer my greetings and even turning away when I addressed them.

At the end of my 1930 visit to Nuerland I had learnt a little of the language but had the scantiest notes of their customs. In the dry season of 1931 I returned to make a fresh attempt, going first for a fortnight to the American Mission at Nasser, where I was generously assisted by the American and Nuer staff,

and then to cattle camps on the Nyanding river—an unfortunate choice, for the Nuer there were more hostile than those I had hitherto encountered and the conditions were harsher than any I had previously experienced. The water was scanty and foul, the cattle were dying of rinderpest, and the camps swarmed with flies. The Nuer would not carry my stores and equipment, and as I had only two donkeys, one of them lame, it was impossible to move. Eventually I managed to obtain a lorry and extricate myself, but not before experiencing the Nuer in his most paralysing mood. As every effort was made to prevent me from entering the cattle camps and it was seldom that I had visitors I was almost entirely cut off from communication with the people. My attempts to prosecute inquiries were persistently obstructed.

Nuer are expert at sabotaging an inquiry and until one has resided with them for some weeks they steadfastly stultify all efforts to elicit the simplest facts and to elucidate the most innocent practices. I have obtained in Zandeland more information in a few days than I obtained in Nuerland in as many weeks. After a while the people were prepared to visit me in my tent, to smoke my tobacco, and even to joke and make small talk, but they were unwilling either to receive me in their windcreens or to discuss serious matters. Questions about customs were blocked by a technique I can commend to natives who are inconvenienced by the curiosity of ethnologists. The following specimen of Nuer methods is the commencement of a conversation on the Nyanding river, on a subject which admits of some obscurity but, with willingness to co-operate, can soon be elucidated.

I: Who are you?

Cuol: A man.

I: What is your name?

Cuol: Do you want to know my *name*?

I: Yes.

Cuol: You want to know *my* name?

I: Yes, you have come to visit me in my tent and I would like to know who you are.

Cuol: All right. I am Cuol. What is your name?

I: My name is Pritchard.

Cuol: What is your father's name?

I: My father's name is also Pritchard.

Cuol: No, that cannot be true. You cannot have the same name as your father.

I: It is the name of my lineage. What is the name of your lineage?

Cuol: Do you want to know the name of my lineage?

I: Yes.

Cuol: What will you do with it if I tell you? Will you take it to your country?

I: I don't want to do anything with it. I just want to know it since I am living at your camp.

Cuol: Oh well, we are Lou.

I: I did not ask you the name of your tribe. I know that. I am asking you the name of your lineage.

Cuol: Why do you want to know the name of my lineage?

I: I don't want to know it.

Cuol: Then why do you ask me for it? Give me some tobacco.

I defy the most patient ethnologist to make headway against this kind of opposition. One is just driven crazy by it. Indeed, after a few weeks of associating solely with Nuer one displays, if the pun be allowed, the most evident symptoms of 'Nuerosis'.

From the Nyanding I moved, still without having made any real progress, to a cattle camp at Yakwac on the Sobat river where I pitched my tent a few yards from the windcreens. Here I remained, save for a short interval spent at the American Mission, for over three months—till the commencement of the rains. After the usual initial difficulties I at last began to feel myself a member of a community and to be accepted as such, especially when I had acquired a few cattle. When the campers at Yakwac returned to their inland village I had no means of accompanying them and intended to visit Leek country again. A severe attack of malaria sent me to Malakal hospital, and thence to England, instead. Five and a half months' work was accomplished on this second expedition.

During the tenure of a subsequent appointment in Egypt I published in *Sudan Notes and Records* essays which form the basis of this book, for I had not expected to have a further opportunity to visit the Nuer. However, in 1935 I was granted a two years' research fellowship by the Leverhulme trustees to make an intensive study of the Pagan Galla of Ethiopia. As delay was caused by diplomatic chicanery I spent two and a half

months on the Sudan-Ethiopian frontier making a survey of the Eastern Anuak, and when, at last, I entered Ethiopia the imminence of Italian invasion compelled me to jettison my Galla studies and enabled me to advance my investigation of the Nuer, during a further seven weeks' residence in their country, by revising earlier notes and by collecting more material. I visited the Nuer who live on the Pibor river, renewed my acquaintance with friends of the Nasser Mission and at Yakwac, and spent about a month among the Eastern Jikany at the mouth of the Nyanding.

In 1936, after making a survey of the Nilotic Luo of Kenya, I spent a final seven weeks in Nuerland, visiting that part of it which lies to the west of the Nile, especially the Karlual section of the Leek tribe. My total residence among the Nuer was thus about a year. I do not consider a year adequate time in which to make a sociological study of a people, especially of a difficult people in adverse circumstances, but serious sickness on both the 1935 and 1936 expeditions closed investigations prematurely.

Besides physical discomfort at all times, suspicion and obstinate resistance encountered in the early stages of research, absence of interpreter, lack of adequate grammar and dictionary, and failure to procure the usual informants, there developed a further difficulty as the inquiry proceeded. As I became more friendly with the Nuer and more at home in their language they visited me from early morning till late at night, and hardly a moment of the day passed without men, women, or boys in my tent. As soon as I began to discuss a custom with one man another would interrupt the conversation in pursuance of some affair of his own or by an exchange of pleasantries and jokes. The men came at milking-time and some of them remained till mid-day. Then the girls, who had just finished dairy-work, arrived and insisted on attention. Married women were less frequent visitors, but boys were generally under the awning of my tent if grown-ups were not present to drive them away. These endless visits entailed constant badinage and interruption and, although they offered opportunity for improving my knowledge of the Nuer language, imposed a severe strain. Nevertheless, if one chooses to reside in a Nuer camp one must submit to Nuer custom, and they are persistent and tireless visitors. The chief

privation was the publicity to which all my actions were exposed, and it was long before I became hardened, though never entirely insensitive, to performing the most intimate operations before an audience or in full view of the camp.

Since my tent was always in the midst of homesteads or windscreens and my inquiries had to be conducted in public, I was seldom able to hold confidential conversations and never succeeded in training informants capable of dictating texts and giving detailed descriptions and commentaries. This failure was compensated for by the intimacy I was compelled to establish with the Nuer. As I could not use the easier and shorter method of working through regular informants I had to fall back on direct observation of, and participation in, the everyday life of the people. From the door of my tent I could see what was happening in camp or village and every moment was spent in Nuer company. Information was thus gathered in particles, each Nuer I met being used as a source of knowledge, and not, as it were, in chunks supplied by selected and trained informants. Because I had to live in such close contact with the Nuer I knew them more intimately than the Azande, about whom I am able to write a much more detailed account. Azande would not allow me to live as one of themselves; Nuer would not allow me to live otherwise. Among Azande I was compelled to live outside the community; among Nuer I was compelled to be a member of it. Azande treated me as a superior; Nuer as an equal.

I do not make far-reaching claims. I believe that I have understood the chief values of the Nuer and am able to present a true outline of their social structure, but I regard, and have designed, this volume as a contribution to the ethnology of a particular area rather than as a detailed sociological study, and I shall be content if it is accepted as such. There is much that I did not see or inquire into and therefore plenty of opportunity for others to make investigations in the same field and among neighbouring peoples. I hope they will do so and that one day we may have a fairly complete record of Nilotic social systems.