

HISTORICAL CORNER

HOW KING KABALEGA DEFEATED SIR SAMUEL BAKER

SIR SAMUEL BAKER

Samuel Baker, later Sir Samuel Baker, was an English adventurer in far off countries such as the Balkans, India, Ceylon and Africa. He was born in 1821, of a wealthy family of a line of naval captains. He was a lover of shooting big game such as elephants in Ceylon; tigers in India, and bears in the Balkans.

He lost his first wife and married again. With his second wife he went to the Sudan and did some exploring and learned Arabic, and went up the Nile, arriving at Khartoum in 1862.

From Khartoum he and his wife set off for Gondokoro on 18th December 1862, ^{by} with a request by the Royal Geographical Society *in England,* to search for Speke and Grant, whose whereabouts were not known for a year. After being two weeks in Gondokoro, they were met there by Speke and Grant.

Here at Gondokoro, Speke told Baker of the great lake he had heard of when passing through Bunyoro. This news sent Baker and his wife southwards to Mruli, the capital of Kamurasi, King of Bunyoro, in order to verify the truth of the report. ^{He befriended Kamurasi.} On 4th March, 1864, Baker and his wife became the first white folks to set their eyes on Lake Mutanzige, and they thought that they had discovered a new lake, which they named Lake Albert or Albert Nyanza, after Prince Consort of England.

They sailed in a canoe northward setting their eyes on the falls which they called Murchison Falls, on 3rd April, 1864. They arrived at Gondokoro again, in March, 1865, and at last in October 1865, ~~they~~ they reached Suez and set sail for England.

ISMAIL, THE KHEDEVE OF EGYPT PLANS TO ANNEX BUNYORO AND BUGANDA

Egypt for many years had been under the Ottoman Empire, but by the 1860's, the Ottoman control had weakened although technically Egypt was still part of the Empire.

In 1863, Ismail succeeded his uncle Mohammed Said as Khedive of Egypt. It was at the time of the American Civil War, which brought great financial prosperity to Egypt through the sale of their cotton. Ismail, a man of great gifts and charm, took this opportunity to make himself multi-millionaire, and very powerful politically.

He westernised Egypt and cause many reforms such ^{as} making the Suez Canal; a railway across the desert; the post office and several other enterprises. He modernised Cairo and the army and ~~he~~ built a new palace for himself and made himself virtually independent of Constantinople. Because of his forward-looking ^{policy} ~~outlook~~ he became popular with many European countries.

Then he conceived a grand Egyptian Empire covering the whole region of the Nile Basin to the shores of Lake Victoria, including Bunyoro and Buganda with an eye to monopolizing the trade of those regions. Thus making it possible for him to control the waters of the Nile all the way.

For the success of such a grand design he depended upon the services of Europeans, especially Englishmen. In order to attract them he put out a theory that by trading in ivory in the Sudan and in the rest of these areas, the slave trade would automatically be wiped out. He, therefore, occupied Southern Sudan.

BAKER BECOMES GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF EQUATORIAL NILE BASIN

Among the people whom Ismail, the Khedive, invited for the opening of the Suez Canal, in 1869, were their Royal Highness, the Prince and Princess of Wales, who later became King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra, of England. Their Royal Highnesses brought with them Sir Samuel Baker as interpreter. The Khedive used this occasion to announce to the whole world his plans of total abolition of the slave trade in the region of the Nile Basin. At the same time he appointed Sir. Samuel Baker Governor-General of the Equatorial Nile Basin, with the intention of annexing the Nile Basin to Egypt and to establish Government there. His objectives of the expedition as he described them to Sir. Samuel Baker, were to sub^{due} to Egypt's authority all the countries south of Gondokoro; to suppress the slave trade and introduce regular commerce; to open to navigation the great Equatorial lakes; and to establish a chain of military stations.

Baker's appointment was for four years from April 1869. He was to become a Pasha, i.e. a Lord of the Ottoman Empire and a Major General with a salary of £40,000 spread over four years. He would choose his own staff of a force of 1700 men etc.

Baker was very delighted and accepted the commission. On 8th February, 1870, he started his journey south of Khartoum. But he did not reach Gondokoro until 15th April 1871, because of the sudd or marsh barriers in the river. On 26th May 1871, he proclaimed the annexation of Gondokoro.

BAKER VERSUS KING KABALEGA

As there was very little time left of the four years, Baker left Gondokoto and advanced south to Bunyoro. He arrived at Masindi on 15th April 1872. Kamurasi had died three years previously and had been succeeded by his son Kabarega.

Masindi, Baker thought, was a large town but neglected. It was "composed of some thousands of beehive shaped straw huts without any arrangement or plan."

He described Kabarega as a young⁺man of twenty years of age, about five feet ten inches in height, and of extreme light complexion, with large eyes and a large mouth and exceedingly white teeth—Kabarega did not smoke as tobacco would blacken his teeth! His hands and feet were beautifully shaped. His hut was large and neatly constructed, ornamented with printed cotton cloths from Zanzibar. He was clad in beautifully made bark cloth, striped with black; and he was exceedingly neat.

But Baker did not think much of Kabarega, who^m he described in his diary with all uncomplimentary adjectives.

Baker feigned friendship to Kabarega with suppressed malice, which implicitly inspired suspicion in Kabarega, which simply reveals that Baker was true to his cause as he was not making any pretence of what he had come to do, to dominate Kabarega.

After telling Kabarega that he had come as the representative of ^{the} Khedive of Egypt; and that the whole of the Equatorial Nile Basin would be taken under his protection; and that no unnecessary wars would be permitted; and that he, Kabarega, would remain as the representative through whom alone the affairs of the country would be conducted, Baker commenced building a Government House, and a private dwelling for himself, at Masindi, on 25th April 1872.

Kabarega did not question this high-handed action of his visitor; he simply informed Baker that as he wished to be in constant communication with him personally, he should build a new shade within a few yards of his residence, so that they could converse upon all occasions without being watched by his people. Baker agreed, and the new building was constructed in no time. This was Kabarega's diplomatic response, as Baker soon found ^{out} afterwards that the purpose ^{of} ~~for~~ erecting the building, within fifty yards of his house, was to have a vantage point from which his guards could watch all that happened and report everything.

One day Baker was speaking to his men, at a small ceremony, and he told them that he was going to hoist the Ottoman flag and to officially annex the country in the presence of Kabarega and his people. Kabarega's guards, from the new house, overheard this and went and reported it to Kabarega. After that Kabarega was very reluctant to come to Baker.

On 14th May 1872, Baker took formal possession, in front of Kabarega and his people, of Bunyoro, in the name of Egypt. A tall flag was fixed at the Government House. After this occasion Kabarega was no more to be seen.

Then Baker began to find it very difficult indeed to get food for his men. He sent constantly to Kabarega without much success of getting food.

At last Kabarega decided to send him five large jars of plantain beer, on 7th June, with a ^{polite} ~~petite~~ explanation that he much regretted the scarcity of corn. But Baker declined the present, as he did not require drink but solid food for the troops. The jars were, therefore, returned to Kabarega.

Kabarega who would not be desuaded from his purpose, at sunset sent back to Baker not ~~five~~ jars of beer but seven and two large packages of flour, alleging that he had borrowed the flour from someone. Baker says that the messenger was exceedingly polite, and smiled and bowed beseeeking him to accept the beer, "and plenty of corn would be sent on the following day, when better arrangements would be made for future supplies".

Baker could no longer refuse the beer and he ordered his officer to take it for the officers and troops.

Later in the evening Baker received a report from the officer in question that many of the troops appeared to be dying; they had definitely been poisoned.

The following day, 8th June, 1872, the Battle of Masindi started. Kabarega's sharpshooters in thousands attacked Baker's headquarters and opened fire on him, from the bushes within a few yards. They rushed from all directions killing some of Baker's most trusty officers and men.

Baker retaliated^a quickly and vigourously. His "Forty Thieves" grabbed their rifles and opened fire point-blank upon the thousands of Kabarega's men charging upon them. It was Baker's "Blue light" which saved the situation for Baker as their "Hale Rocket" dispersed Kabarega's men into the bush. Baker ordered the burning of the Masindi town and it was completely destroyed, and the battle of Masindi was over in one hour. But that was not the end.

The Banyoro did not retire; they kept on skirmishing about Baker's lines from the heavy cover of the grass until they made it impossible for Baker to stay any more in Masindi. Food was becoming scarce and scarce. It was clear that Baker had won the battle, but had lost the war to Kabarega.

On June 15th Baker retreated to Foweira sixty miles to the north-east north-east of the Nile. Of his advancing guard of 200, which had gone to Masindi, only three Europeans and 97 men reached Foweira.