

# Evening Meeting.

Monday, May 7th, 1860.

Captain E. G. FISHBOURNE, R.N., C.B., in the Chair.

The Chairman announced that Nine Members had joined the Institution since the 30th April.

Paterson, E. T. L., Capt. 63rd Regt.  
Clutterbuck, G. W., Lieut. 63rd Regt.  
Crowther, R. M. B., Lieut. 63rd Regt.  
Boyd, Jas. P., Lieut. 63rd Regt.  
Smyth, Jas. S., Ens. 63rd Regt.

Atkinson, Thos., Ens. 63rd Regt.  
Scovell, T., Ens. 63rd Regt.  
Leather, Jno. T., Capt. 2 Dorset Art. Vols.  
Clarke, John, Assist. Surg., 95th Regt.

## PRESENTS.

### LIBRARY.

#### *Books.*

- Ellis, C. B. E., Lieut. R.A.—Military Notes, written at Secunderabad, India. No. II. Large 8vo. *Presented by the Author.*  
Royal Artillery Institution.—Occasional papers of. Vol. I. No. 21. *Presented by the Institution.*  
Royal Society of Edinburgh.—Transactions of the Society, Vol. XXII., Part I, for the Sessions 1857-8. 4to. Proceedings of the Society, Session 1858-59. 8vo. *Presented by the Society.*  
Royal Society.—Proceedings of. Vol. X. No. 38. *Presented by the Society.*

### MUSEUM.

#### *Military.*

- Model of Captain Grant's Apparatus for Cooking for Troops in the Field. Complete. *Presented by Captain J. Grant, late R.A.*  
11 Spears, 10 Spear-heads, 5 Swords, 1 Knife, from the Somali Country. *Presented by Brigadier Coghlan, Bombay Artillery, Aden.*

#### *Naval.*

- Model of a Malay Boat. *Presented by Brigadier Coghlan, Bombay Artillery, Aden.*

#### *Miscellaneous.*

- 1 Medal for Long Service and Good Conduct.  
1 Ditto for Meritorious Service. *Presented by the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty.*



## ON THE ARMS OF THE ARAB AND NEGRO TRIBES OF CENTRAL AFRICA, BORDERING ON THE WHITE NILE.

By JOHN PETHERICK, Esq., F.R.G.S., H.M. Consul, Soudan.

IN compliance with an invitation from the Council of this Institution, to describe the arms of the tribes inhabiting the countries bordering on the White Nile, amongst whom it has been my lot to reside during the last eleven years, I must beg to solicit, in my behalf, the leniency of the Chairman and Members of this highly learned Society, whom I now have the honour to address, my knowledge of arms and the use of them being entirely unprofessional, and derived less from science than pure practical experience, which, had it not been superior to my descriptive powers, I have little doubt you would have been spared the present communication.

The rich and highly-elaborate Museum of this Institution, containing, as it does, specimens of every description of fire-arm, from the crude match-lock to the most perfect specimens of the rifle of our time; any remark of mine upon the subject will be superfluous, and I shall commence my subject with a description of those tribes who, if the use of powder be not entirely unknown amongst them, object to burn it, and prefer to combat single-handed with cold steel, as did their ancient conquerors the Greeks and Romans.

The Arab tribes, as you are well aware, bordering on the Mediterranean, and far into the interior of Western Africa, have for centuries been familiar with the match and fire lock. Ascending the Nile, the first Arabs, with but few individual exceptions, repudiating the use of fire-arms, are the Jemaes, Ababda, and Bishari tribes, inhabiting the eastern Nile bank, and thence the Desert, to the shore of the Red Sea. The territories of the Jemaes extend from north to south, from Cairo to Keneh, in Upper Egypt; the Ababda, from Keneh to the second Cataract, and following the Nile to the province of Berber, in the Soudan; whilst the Bishari inhabit the interior of the Desert, and the coast of the Red Sea, from the latitude of Wadi Halfa, or the second Nile Cataract, to the province of Taka, in the south-east of the Soudan.

The arms of the above tribes are fewer in number, and, according to their manner of using them, less destructive of life than those used by any other people with whom I am acquainted, and which I can only account for by the repugnance of the Arab generally to slay his enemy, but who would rather wound and disable him, in order that the feud may be confined to himself, rather than descend to generations, as, in cases of loss of life, nothing but blood will exiate it.

A cross-handled, straight, double-edged sword, worn in a leather sheath, suspended by a strap to the left shoulder, and a similar shaped knife or dagger, in a scabbard, attached to the left arm, above the elbow, are the only weapons of the Arabs of the above tribes; whilst for defence a

thick round shield, from 15 to 18 inches in diameter, made of the hide of the giraffe or antelope, is the invariable accompaniment, which, in the dry climate they inhabit, becomes so hard as to offer sufficient resistance to any blow that may be dealt on it with a sword.

The Arab of either of the tribes to which I am alluding makes use of his sword for cutting only, and then generally at the arms or legs of his enemy, instead of at the head or body, with a desire, as before explained, rather to disable than to kill him, for which reason he never thrusts.

It is only when down or disarmed, and sorely pressed, that he employs the knife, and then, unless he is convinced of the determination of his opponent to take his life, he will invariably strike at the members of the body in preference to any vital part.

The usual method of fighting adopted by these people, when tribe is arrayed against tribe, is on foot, first hiding their cattle in some distant wadi or mountain gorge; but on all marauding excursions, where plunder is the object, they ride fleet dromedaries, for the superior breed of which the Bishari are justly celebrated.

The Nubians, subdivided into Mahass, Kenoos, Dangolauis, Shaygyas, and Jabyeen, since the invasion and subjugation of Nubia and the Souḍan by Mahomed Ali Pacha, have adopted the use of fire-arms in the shape of flint-lock muskets and pistols, in preference to the swords and lances of their forefathers; but the nomades of the desert, being less in contact with their conquerors, have retained their primitive arms and mode of warfare.

Thus the Kababish, Meganeen, Hababeen, Hamr, Hauasma, and Bagara Arabs inhabiting the Kordofan and its deserts, in addition to the sword already described, use the spear and lance, but discard the knife, and defend themselves with a long oblong shield of tough antelope hide. These tribes fight on foot and on horseback.

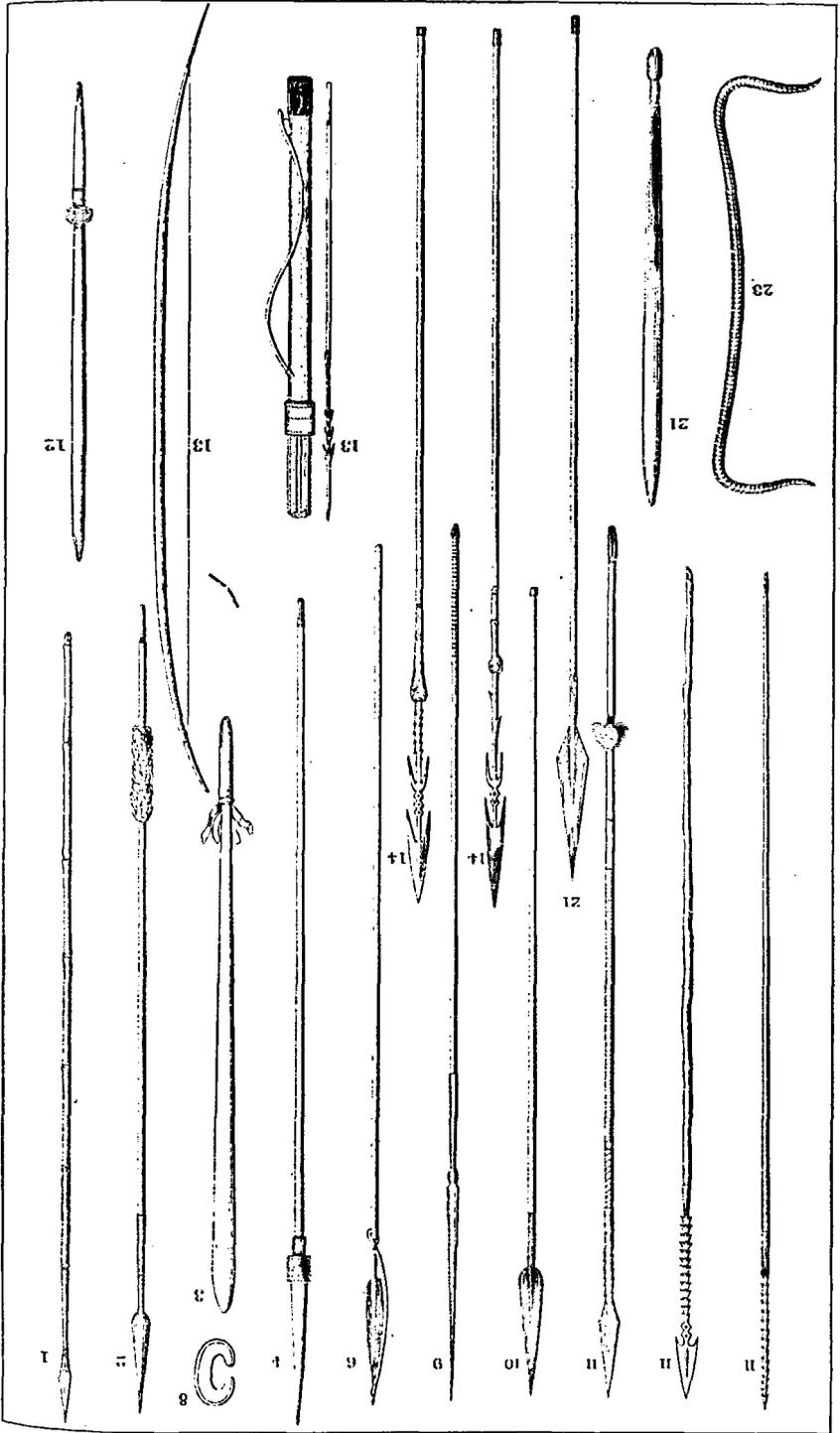
When on foot they mostly confine themselves to the use of a shield, and several lances, which they throw at the enemy from distances amounting to forty or fifty yards.

The horsemen, when going to battle, cover their cattle to the knees with a defensive armour of thick felt, and wear an iron casque and mail shirt over their dress. Their arms are only a sword and spear, which latter, being heavier and of stronger materials than the lance, is but seldom thrown, and then only when certain of effect.

Their mode of warfare consists in a series of brisk charges and as sudden retreats, the fall of a chief, or two or three leading men, being sufficient to decide a battle. The most bloody encounter that I have known during my acquaintance with them, when there have been perhaps 2,000 men engaged, has entailed no greater loss than thirty killed on the field.

They have a wholesome fear of fire-arms, and with two men only, armed with fowling pieces, I have on more than one occasion, whilst travelling in the deserts of Kordofan, kept large bodies of Arabs intent on mischief, at harmless distances.

Following the course of the Nile, and leaving the dependencies of Egypt, the first negro populations are the Shillooks and Dinka tribes, the former to the west, and the latter to the east of the Nile, both of which are large tribes, inhabiting a district extending from the 12th to the 9th degree of north latitude; and the Dinka tribes from the 29th to about the 33rd



degree of east longitude. The Shillooks inhabit a narrower district, perhaps not extending to one degree of longitude, yet are equally as numerous a family; not being so nomade in their habits as the Dinkas, and attending more to agriculture, they live in large villages at but short distances from the river, and, employing canoes, enjoy greater facilities with regard to their intercourse with each other, than is the case with the Dinka purely nomadic race.

The pastoral Dinkas use only one large and two or three smaller lances (see figs. 1, 2), without a shield, a substitute for which is a heavy stick with which they cleverly ward off a coming lance, using it as a club (fig. 3), and with it drive their cattle, of which they possess large herds.

Iron the Dinkas have not, and they are obliged to purchase their lances from their neighbours the Arabs. As a substitute for iron, after insertion in boiling water, they straighten the horns of antelopes and gazelles for lance points (fig. 4).

Their method of fighting, as is the case with the whole of the negro tribes with whom I am acquainted, is on foot, as they have no beast of burthen, and, although they are large cattle owners, the ox has never been made serviceable, as among the neighbouring Bagara Arabs, to carry loads or man.

Leaving the Nile at its junction with the Sobat, and proceeding towards the source of that river, on one of its branches, in about 7 degrees north latitude, and 31 to 32 degrees east longitude, we find the Djibba tribe, a different race, with a distinct language; they are a fine, tall, and well-made people, of dark colour, and ornament themselves with skins of the panther and antelope; the scalps of their enemies, worked up and ornamented with cowrie-shells attached to their own hair, form a tail, which for length and breadth surpasses any thing of the sort worn by the most aristocratic or fashionable member of the celestial empire (fig. 5). Lances (fig. 6) and assayas, their only arms, are particularly sharp, the former often performing the duty of razors. The assaya (fig. 7), intended for throwing as well as cutting, in the same style as a scimitar, by gently drawing it when home, is capable of dealing a fearful wound, its edge being as sharp as hard wood will permit of; and to preserve it from injury, like the lance, it is protected by a stiff leather covering, removable at pleasure (see fig. 7).

The Djibba wears also a peculiarly sharp-edged iron bracelet on each wrist (fig. 8), which, for the double purpose of keeping sharp, and his skin intact, is also covered with a strip of leather, which, however, in case of need, he removes, and closing with his enemy, whom he grasps in his arms, is capable of inflicting serious wounds on him with his bracelets, thus proving the reverse of our custom, that the tighter the embrace the more cutting it becomes.

Returning to the Nile, and following to the furthest point known, the cataracts beyond Gondocoro, about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  degrees north latitude, the tribes are similarly armed to the Shillooks (figs. 21), with but slight variation in the shape of the lance, that used by the Barri being much longer in the blade than is usual amongst negroes of other denominations (fig. 9). The Nouaer on both sides of the Nile, from 8 to 10 degrees north latitude, wear a helmet made of cylindrical white beads (fig. 22).

The people bordering on the Bahr il Gazal, and the interior as far as the 6th degree of north latitude, in addition to the smooth lance (fig. 10), carry two or three barbed lances (figs. 11), which they throw at their enemy while charging, and which, if they penetrate into the body, are difficult to extract, requiring a most severe and painful operation to be performed.

Originally Dinka, and subdivided into many families forming distinct tribes, having their language only in common, these negroes, in addition to a stiff club (fig. 12) made from the root of a tree, which they are expert in casting as well as fencing with, carry an instrument like a bow (fig. 23), for the purpose of warding off projectiles, and which, with the club and a lance, or two, are grasped in the left hand, whilst throwing a lance with the right.

The next tribe to the south extends over 5 degrees of latitude to within 1 degree of the equator, differing in language as well as in habits from any of the tribes hitherto mentioned.

The Dôr, in stature, are not so tall as their northern neighbours, the Dinka and their descendants, being a middle-sized, square-set, and muscular race of people; neither is their skin so jet black, but is of a dark brown or bronzed colour. They manufacture their own weapons from rich iron ores, which exist in what I consider to be the new red sandstone.

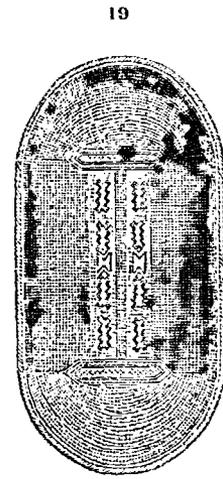
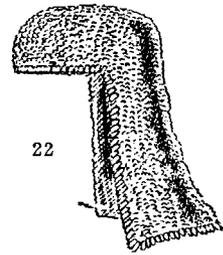
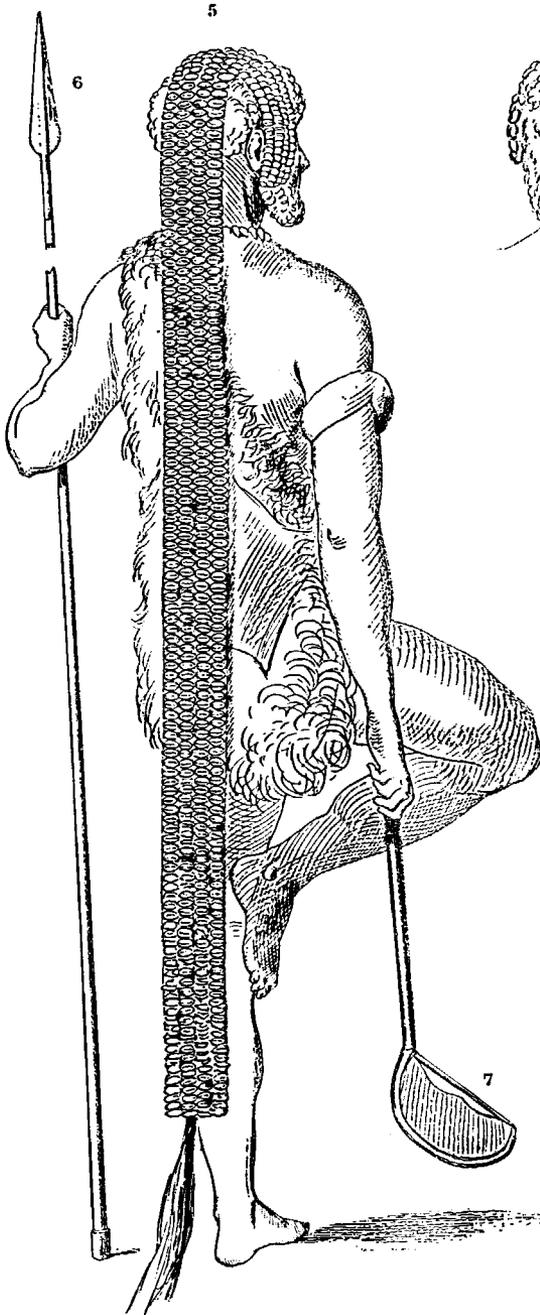
The great dissimilarity of the races inhabiting the district from the 6th degree of north latitude to the equator, the limits of my peregrinations, I consider to be caused by the presence of the Taetse fly, which, by destroying the cattle, necessitates agricultural pursuits, while they in their turn entail fixed residences, though, strange to say, less warlike propensities are not thereby induced.

This tribe, superior to any other known to me in point of territorial possessions and population, recognises no individual chief, but is subdivided into distinct settlements or townships, over which a chief presides, whose sole authority by each separate community is upheld, and which, as a general rule, is at feud with some one or more of its neighbours living at but a few miles apart.

Their only domestic animal is the goat; therefore, for animal food they are obliged to follow the chase; and this often becomes the occasion of quarrels and feuds with their countrymen inhabiting adjoining districts.

Their arms, equally as their habits, differ from the Dinka or the Djour to the north and west of them; the favourite weapon of the Dôr is the bow and arrow (figs. 13), with which they use three or four fearfully barbed spears (figs. 14), and clubs (figs. 15), dissimilar to any hitherto described, and, as is evident from the peculiarity of their shape, are not required to ward off a lance, for which purpose the bow suffices, but are used sometimes to cast, and invariably to inflict a blow wherewith to crush the skull of a fallen enemy.

The workmanship of the arrows will bear inspection (fig. 13), when it will be found that the heads of scarcely two are alike, and the generality of them so numerous barbed that extraction cannot take place without making a considerable incision to free it from the muscle or flesh in which it may be imbedded.



Occasionally, some of these arrows are poisoned; this, however, with the Dôr is but rarely the case, as they are also used in the chase.

Poisoned arrows are more commonly used by the tribes south of Fazogl, on the confines of the Gallas and Abyssinia, and are less dreaded than might be imagined, as burning out the wound by an immediate application of fire, such as the ignited end of a stick, will invariably counteract the otherwise deadly venom.

The tactics of the Dôr when giving battle are to run up to within fifty or sixty yards of the enemy, and discharge a quantity of arrows at him, and if not successful, to undertake as rapid a retreat; when followed and approached, they receive a similar flight of arrows, which, after endeavouring to evade by a series of gymnastics, as soon as they are spent, they repeat the charge, and so on, until on one side or the other so many arrows have taken effect as to impede the rapid movements of a certain number of the party, which is taken advantage of by a hot pursuit; then, when encumbered by the arrows, the men that have been so hit, unable to extract them and accompany their unscathed companions, drop behind, and thus become the objects at whom to throw barbed lances. If hit by several arrows, or a barbed lance, the unfortunate Dôr, finding no safety in flight, will, like a stag, stand at bay, and endeavour to keep off his pursuers as long as he is provided with an arrow or lance; when, deprived of his own arms, and compelled to stoop to pick up those that have been thrown at him, his relentless enemy, taking advantage of the movement, soon puts him *hors de combat*, by one or more lances in his body; a rush is then made at him, and, if not already down, he is felled by a club, and with the same instrument an end is put to his sufferings.

This sort of running warfare may suit a people with light arms, and unencumbered with clothing; but, having joined a party as a spectator, it was entirely unsuited to myself, attired in a shooting jacket and the paraphernalia of European costume, as, although in tolerable marching condition, the constant running took the wind out of me, and, with only a few men left behind, I was exposed to the charge of the whole body in pursuit. A bold front, and a demonstration of making use of my fire-arms, sufficed to bring the enemy to a full stop and take to a precipitate retreat, which, with little power and less inclination to pursue, and having seen sufficient to satisfy my curiosity, I allowed my friends to take advantage of, from which they returned with four of the heads of the fugitives in their hands, as trophies wherewith to ornament a tree or a pole over the huts of the victors.

Previous to this I had seen the heads and hands of three victims, taken for similar purposes, the bodies of which were secreted in thick bush, to elude discovery and burial by the friends of the slain.

The negroes it will be observed, unlike the Arabs, endeavour to slay as many of their enemies as possible, and have no compunction at destroying life, and so brutal are the particular tribe to which I now allude, that it is a rule with them never to make prisoners, but kill even women and children.

It has been my good fortune, during three years' intimacy with this tribe, to arrest the most atrocious massacres, a recital of which would be more painful than edifying.

The Mundo tribe inhabit a hilly and even mountainous country between the equator and the first degree of north latitude; and, in preference to the bow and arrow, use the barbed lance (fig. 14), a shield formed of a single narrow piece of hard wood, with a boss in the centre, as a guard to the hand (figs. 16), and an iron projectile not unlike a bill-hook, or curved sword (figs. 17).

Clever in the use of this instrument, the Mundo throws it with considerable address, employing it in the chase for killing antelopes, or even smaller game. If he succeeds in breaking the leg of an antelope, it has but little chance of escape, as the hunter pursues it obstinately, killing it eventually with his lance.

The Runga, or Neam Nam, inhabit the regions of the equator, and thence south, and are a large, powerful, slave-holding tribe, calling themselves cannibals, and reputed to be so by their neighbours.

It was not without difficulty that I succeeded in forming friendly relations with these people, and not until I had killed a vulture, which was hovering over my party, and subsequently an elephant, within the limits of their village, would they listen to overtures of any description, convinced though they were by the great noise and effect of my fire-arms, of which they had previously neither seen nor heard, as they afterwards expressed themselves, that it was in my power to exterminate the whole race.

The Neam Nam make war on their surrounding neighbours for the purpose of kidnapping slaves, to whom they entrust the cultivation of their lands; and, although holding them in perpetual bondage, treat them with consideration and kindness.

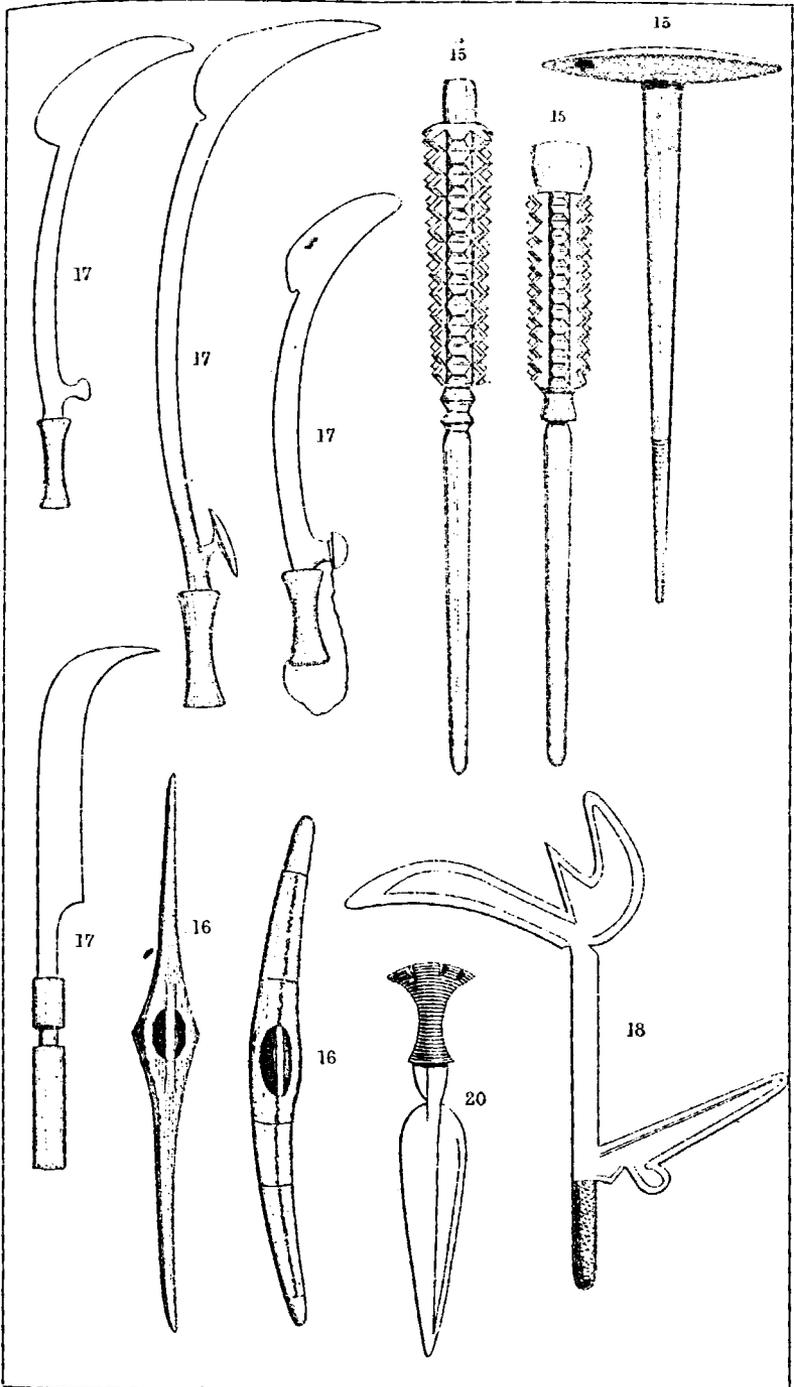
The only occupations which a Neam Nam will stoop to, are war and the chase, to which he is from early youth inured, and thus becomes the terror of the neighbouring tribes.

His arms consist of the smooth and barbed lance (figs. 10, 14), and a curiously-contrived projectile (fig. 18), of which I regret to have lost the best samples, with many other curiosities and living animals, by the wreck of my boat in the Nubian cataracts.

The shield is made of reeds, or the leaf of the palm-tree, interwoven in tasteful patterns of variegated colours (fig. 19); and a kind of cloth, with which they cover themselves, is also made by this tribe of the inside fibres of bark, the threads of which are dyed with several colours.

When giving battle, the Neam Nam has two or three of the iron missiles already alluded to (fig. 18), suspended by a leather button to the inside of the shield, lying directly over the handle of it, the whole of which, and a couple of lances, he grasps with his left hand, whilst with a lance in the right hand he assails his enemy. The iron weapon, when employed, is thrown with great force, and in such a manner as to revolve upon its centre when spinning through the air, therefore the wound created by such an instrument must be a fearful one.

The shield made of so light a substance will not repel a lance, but when struck by one, the combatant giving it a slight movement, either to the right or left, counteracts the penetration of the lance, which, becoming entangled and suspended in it, furnishes him with his enemy's weapon, in lieu of his own, which he is supposed to have cast.



Attached to his waistbelt is a knife (fig. 20) suspended by a ring to the scabbard, hilt downwards, which perhaps is the most convenient way of drawing it, being easily done without requiring the assistance of the left hand, and, fitting tight, undergoes no risk of falling out. The point of the sheath, it will be observed, is turned outwards, so as effectually to prevent its injuring the owner in case of a fall or whilst stooping.

The negroes generally trust less to a shield to ward off a lance or threatened missile than to their great agility in jumping out of its way, at which they are exceedingly clever, and their frequent complaint against fire-arms is, that, not being able to see the ball, they cannot evade it.

With regard to manufactures I may, perhaps, be permitted to state that the Shillooks work a very neat mat of reeds, which, spread on the ground, is doubtless but a modest dining table, but of which they are proud; these mats are of various colours and numerous patterns.

But for the first attempt to manufacture an article of dress of a complicated nature by an independent negro tribe in the regions of the Nile, the merit must be given to the Neam Nam, a specimen of their work, as a relief to the dark side of their character, that of cannibalism and slave-hunting, I am happy to introduce to your notice.

Trifling as the present sample of negro manufacture may appear at first glance, it proves that those races hitherto ignored by the civilized world, and abandoned to their own impulses without the benefit of any moral check or example, are at least possessed of sufficient intellect, and even industry, to give rise to hopes for improvement, both morally as well as spiritually, were they but afforded the opportunities; and I cannot close the subject of the present paper without availing myself of the opportunity which it affords me to express a hope that it may be the humble means of enlisting the sympathies of the Members of the Royal United Service Institution in behalf of the country and tribes which I have had the honour to introduce to their notice.