

Agricultural Production in the Sudan

by Paul Samael



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Agricultural Production in the Sudan

My name is Jamal and I am a farmer. If it pleases Allah, my sons will be farmers too. It is hard work, I tell them, but our crops will feed many families. We are making a better life for our country. They nod their heads and smile. Then they say: "Tell us about the Sheikh, baba!" I have told them this story many times before. But they never tire of hearing it.

I was a young man and I needed work. "Go see this man!" said my friend. "He has so much land, he doesn't know what to do with it all!" Of course, I did not see the Sheikh himself. He had many people working for him. The man I saw sent me to Al Qadarif province. "We are growing peanuts there," he said. "Or maybe it is water melons." I do not think this man knew much about farming. But he signed my papers and gave me money for the journey.

When we arrived at the farm, there were no peanuts or water melons. The fields were brown and empty. "What are we growing?" I asked the manager. "Sunflowers," he said. "This year, we will grow the biggest sunflower in the world! Much taller than you or me!"

At first, I did not believe him. The first shoots of the sunflower look like weeds. How can such plants grow taller than a man? But they do. Rows and rows of giant yellow flowers, as far as the eye can see. Months later, when we had finished measuring the tallest ones, the manager was excited. "I must write to Khartoum about this," he said. And that is how the Sheikh came to visit our farm.

The manager made us all line up in front of the farm house. The Sheikh and his men arrived in big white jeeps, with tinted windows and air-conditioning. All of them had long beards. The ones with guns did not smile. Their eyes were dark and cold. I do not think they were interested in sunflowers. But the Sheikh smiled at us. His face was gentle and kind.

We showed him the sunflowers. The two tallest had grown up next to each other, but in different rows. One was just a little bit taller than the other – but you could only know this by measuring them. The Sheikh laughed and said “These sunflowers should be in the Guinness Book of World Records.” He said it was a big book full of the biggest, tallest and fastest things on earth.

While we were talking, a plane flew overhead. All the men looked up. But the Sheikh said: “Why are you all looking up there? Allah’s miracle is down here, growing in this field! What use is it just gazing up at the sky?” At first we thought he was angry. But he just smiled and asked if he could take the two sunflowers back to Khartoum with him. The manager told us to dig them up.

Later, the Sheikh ate with us at the farm house. He talked about his plans for farming in our country. He said that he had much land in the north-east and in the west. “If we can grow sunflowers like this here in Sudan,” he said, “we can grow enough food to feed the whole world!” The manager said that we need to improve our irrigation systems. “Perhaps,” said the Sheikh, “but what if we had crops which needed less water? Scientists can create the seeds for such crops. With Allah’s help, I am building a laboratory in Khartoum for this. Our seeds will drink half the water that yours do now - but they will grow into plants even taller than your sunflowers!”

Then it was time for the Sheikh to leave. But no one knew what to do with the two sunflowers. They were too tall to fit inside any of the vehicles. In the end, the Sheikh's men opened the sun-roof of one of the jeeps. They drove off with the sunflowers poking out of the top. We watched them go. After a few minutes, we could not see the vehicles very well because of the dust and the heat. But the sunflowers were so tall that we could still see them for a long time.

I tell my sons that the Sheikh did not stay in our country. He left for a more barren land. They nod their heads. They are not smiling any more. They know what he did. But sometimes, when he thinks I am not looking, I catch the oldest one gazing up at the sky.



Author's note

With the exception of the Sheikh, any resemblance to persons living or dead is entirely coincidental. The farm visit depicted in this story is fictitious but certain elements of the story (mostly concerned with the Sheikh) are based on factual accounts. To find out more, go to: <http://www.paulsamael.com/blog/who-s-the-sheikh->

If you enjoyed this story, please consider posting a review of it online or recommending it to others. And whatever you thought of it, thanks for taking the time to read it.



About the author

Paul Samael lives in the UK. He is the author of a novel, “In the future this will not be necessary.” He has published another short story available on both Smashwords.com and Scribd called “The Hardest Word”, which is about kidnapping a banker (it’s a bit longer than this one).

To find out more, go to: <http://www.paulsamael.com>

