SAMUEL WHITE BAKER

THE NILE TRIBUTARIES OF ABYSSINIA, AND THE SWORD HUNTERS OF THE HAMRAN ARABS

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I
ABOVE THE CATARACT

WITHOUT troubling the public with a description of that portion of the Nile to the north of the first cataract, or with a detailed account of the Egyptian ruins, that have been visited by a thousand tourists, I will commence by a few extracts from my journal, written at the close of the boat voyage from Cairo :—

"May 8, 1861.—No air. The thermometer 104 degrees Fahr.; a stifling heat. Becalmed, we have been lying the entire day below the ruins of Philae. These are the most imposing monuments of the Nile, owing to their peculiar situation upon a rocky island that commands the passage of the river above the cataract. The banks of the stream are here hemmed in by ranges of hills from 100 to 250 feet high; these are entirely destitute of soil, being composed of enormous masses of red granite, piled block upon block, the rude masonry of Nature that has walled

in the river. The hollows between the hills are choked with a yellow sand, which, drifted by the wind, has, in many instances, completely filled the narrow valleys. Upon either side of the Nile are vestiges of ancient forts. The land appears as though it bore the curse of Heaven; misery, barrenness, and the heat of a furnace are its features. The glowing rocks, devoid of a trace of vegetation, reflect the sun with an intensity that must be felt to be understood. The miserable people who dwell in villages upon the river's banks snatch every sandbank from the retiring stream, and immediately plant their scanty garden with melons, gourds, lentils, &c. this being their only resource for cultivation. Not an inch of available soil is lost; but day by day, as the river decreases, fresh rows of vegetables are sown upon the newly-acquired land. At Assouan, the sandbanks are purely sand brought down by the cataracts, therefore soil must be added to enable the people to cultivate. They dig earth from the ruins of the ancient town; this they boat across the river and spread upon the sandbank, by which excessive labour they secure sufficient mould to support their crops.

In the vicinity of Philae the very barrenness of the scenery possesses a charm. The iron-like sterility of the granite rocks, naked except in spots where the wind has sheeted them with sand; the groves of palms springing unexpectedly into view in this desert wilderness, as a sudden bend of the river discovers a village; the ever blue and never clouded sky above, and, the only blessing of this blighted land, the Nile, silently flowing

between its stern walls of rocks towards the distant land of Lower Egypt, form a total that produces a scene to be met with nowhere but upon the Nile. In this miserable spot the unfortunate inhabitants are taxed equally with those of the richer districts—about fivepence annually for each date palm.

"May 9.—A good breeze, but tremendous heat. Although the floor and the curtains of the cabin are continually wetted, and the Venetian blinds are closed, the thermometer, at 4 P.M., stood at 105 degrees in the shade; and upon deck, 137 degrees in the sun. This day we passed the ruins of several small temples. The country is generally rocky, with intervals of ten or twelve miles of desert plains.

"May 10.—Fine breeze, the boat sailing well. Passed several small temples. The henna grows in considerable quantities on the left bank of the river. The leaf resembles that of the myrtle; the blossom has a powerful fragrance; it grows like a feather, about eighteen inches long, forming a cluster of small yellow flowers. The day pleasantly cool; thermometer, 95 degrees.

"May 11.—At 5 A.M. we arrived at Korosko; lat. 22 degrees 50 minutes N.; the halting-place for all vessels from Lower Egypt with merchandise for the Soudan."

At this wretched spot the Nile is dreary beyond description, as a vast desert, unenlivened by cultivation, forms its borders, through which the melancholy river rolls towards Lower Egypt in the cloudless glare of a tropical sun. From whence came this extraordinary stream that could flow through these burning sandy

deserts, unaided by tributary channels? That was the mysterious question as we stepped upon the shore now, to commence our land journey in search of the distant sources. We climbed the steep sandy bank, and sat down beneath a solitary sycamore.

We had been twenty-six days sailing from Cairo to this point. The boat returned, and left us on the east bank of the Nile, with the great Nubian desert before us.

Korosko is not rich in supplies. A few miserable Arab huts, with the usual fringe of dusty date palms, compose the village; the muddy river is the frontier on the west, the burning desert on the east. Thus hemmed in, Korosko is a narrow strip of a few yards' width on the margin of the Nile, with only one redeeming feature in its wretchedness—the green shade of the old sycamore beneath which we sat.

I had a firman from the Viceroy, a cook, and a dragoman. Thus my impedimenta were not numerous. The firman was an order to all Egyptian officials for assistance; the cook was dirty and incapable; and the interpreter was nearly ignorant of English, although a professed polyglot. With this small beginning, Africa was before me, and thus I commenced the search for the Nile sources. Absurd as this may appear, it was a correct commencement. Ignorant of Arabic, I could not have commanded a large party, who would have been at the mercy of the interpreter or dragoman; thus, the first qualification necessary to success was a knowledge of the language.

After a delay of some days, I obtained sixteen camels from

the sheik. I had taken the precaution to provide water-barrels, in addition to the usual goat-skins; and, with a trustworthy guide, we quitted Korosko on the 16th May, 1861, and launched into the desert.

The route from Korosko across the Nubian desert cuts off the chord of an arc made by the great westerly bend of the Nile. This chord is about 230 miles in length. Throughout this barren desert there is no water, except at the half-way station, Moorahd (from moorra, bitter); this, although salt and bitter, is relished by camels. During the hot season in which we unfortunately travelled, the heat was intense, the thermometer ranging from 106 degrees to 114 degrees Fahr. in the shade. The parching blast of the simoom was of such exhausting power, that the water rapidly evaporated from the closed water-skins. It was, therefore, necessary to save the supply by a forced march of seven days, in which period we were to accomplish the distance, and to reach Abou Hammed, on the southern bend of the welcome Nile.

During the cool months, from November until February, the desert journey is not disagreeable; but the vast area of glowing sand exposed to the scorching sun of summer, in addition to the withering breath of the simoom, renders the forced march of 230 miles in seven days, at two and a half miles per hour, the most fatiguing journey that can be endured.

Farewell to the Nile! We turned our backs upon the life-giving river, and our caravan commenced the silent desert march.

A few hours from Korosko the misery of the scene surpassed

description. Glowing like a furnace, the vast extent of yellow sand stretched to the horizon. Rows of broken hills, all of volcanic origin, broke the flat plain. Conical tumuli of volcanic slag here and there rose to the height of several hundred feet, and in the far distance resembled the Pyramids of Lower Egypt—doubtless they were the models for that ancient and everlasting architecture; hills of black basalt jutted out from the barren base of sand, and the molten air quivered on the overheated surface of the fearful desert. 114 degrees Fahr. in the shade under the water-skins; 137 degrees in the sun. Noiselessly the spongy tread of the camels crept along the sand—the only sound was the rattle of some loosely secured baggage of their packs. The Arab camel-drivers followed silently at intervals, and hour by hour we struck deeper into the solitude of the Nubian desert.

We entered a dead level plain of orange-coloured sand, surrounded by pyramidical hills: the surface was strewn with objects resembling cannon shot and grape of all sizes from a 32-pounder downwards—the spot looked like the old battle-field of some infernal region; rocks glowing with heat—not a vestige of vegetation—barren, withering desolation.—The slow rocking step of the camels was most irksome, and despite the heat, I dismounted to examine the Satanic bombs and cannon shot. Many of them were as perfectly round as though cast in a mould, others were egg-shaped, and all were hollow. With some difficulty I broke them, and found them to contain a bright red sand: they were, in fact, volcanic bombs that had been formed

by the ejection of molten lava to a great height from active volcanoes; these had become globular in falling, and, having cooled before they reached the earth, they retained their forms as hard spherical bodies, precisely resembling cannon shot. The exterior was brown, and appeared to be rich in iron. The smaller specimens were the more perfect spheres, as they cooled quickly, but many of the heavier masses had evidently reached the earth when only half solidified, and had collapsed upon falling. The sandy plain was covered with such vestiges of volcanic action, and the infernal bombs lay as imperishable relics of a hail-storm such as may have destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.

Passing through this wretched solitude we entered upon a scene of surpassing desolation. Far as the eye could reach were waves like a stormy sea, grey, cold-looking waves in the burning heat; but no drop of water: it appeared as though a sudden curse had turned a raging sea to stone. The simoom blew over this horrible wilderness, and drifted the hot sand into the crevices of the rocks, and the camels drooped their heads before the suffocating wind; but still the caravan noiselessly crept along over the rocky undulations, until the stormy sea was passed: once more we were upon a boundless plain of sand and pebbles.

Here every now and then we discovered withered melons (Cucumis colocynthis); the leaves had long since disappeared, and the shrivelled stalks were brittle as glass. They proved that even the desert had a season of life, however short; but the desert fruits were bitter. So intensely bitter was the dry white interior

of these melons, that it exactly resembled quinine in taste; when rubbed between the fingers, it became a fine white powder. The Arabs use this medicinally; a small piece placed in a cup of milk, and allowed to stand for a few hours, renders the draught a strong aperient. The sun—that relentless persecutor of the desert traveller—sank behind the western hills, and the long wished for night arrived; cool, delicious night! the thermometer 78 degrees Fahr. a difference of 36 degrees between the shade of day.

The guide commanded the caravan,—he was the desert pilot, and no one dared question his directions; he ordered a halt for TWO HOURS' rest. This was the usual stage and halting-place by the side of a perpendicular rock, the base of which was strewn thick with camel's dung; this excellent fuel soon produced a blazing fire, the coffee began to boil, and fowls were roasting for a hasty dinner. A short snatch of sleep upon the sand, and the voice of the guide again disturbed us. The camels had not been unloaded, but had lain down to rest with their packs, and had thus eaten their feed of dhurra (Sorghum vulgare) from a mat. In a few minutes we started, once more the silent and monotonous desert march.

In the cool night I preferred walking to the uneasy motion of the camel; the air was most invigorating after the intense heat of the day and the prostration caused by the simoom. The desert had a charm by night, as the horizon of its nakedness was limited; the rocks assumed fantastic shapes in the bright moonlight, and the profound stillness produced an effect of the supernatural in

that wild and mysterious solitude; the Arab belief in the genii and afreet, and all the demon enemies of man, was a natural consequence of a wandering life in this desert wilderness, where nature is hostile to all living beings.

In forty-six hours and forty-five minutes' actual marching from Korosko we reached Moorahd, "the bitter well."

This is a mournful spot, well known to the tired and thirsty camel, the hope of reaching which has urged him fainting on his weary way to drink one draught before he dies: this is the camel's grave. Situated half way between Korosko and Abou Hammed, the well of Moorahd is in an extinct crater, surrounded upon all sides but one by precipitous cliffs about 300 feet high. The bottom is a dead flat, and forms a valley of sand about 250 yards wide. In this bosom of a crater, salt and bitter water is found at a depth of only six feet from the surface. To this our tired camels frantically rushed upon being unloaded.

The valley was a "valley of dry bones." Innumerable skeletons of camels lay in all directions; the ships of the desert thus stranded on their voyage. Withered heaps of parched skin and bone lay here and there, in the distinct forms in which the camels had gasped their last; the dry desert air had converted the hide into a coffin. There were no flies here, thus there were no worms to devour the carcases; but the usual sextons were the crows, although sometimes too few to perform their office. These were perched upon the overhanging cliffs; but no sooner had our overworked camels taken their long draught and lain down

exhausted on the sand, than by common consent they descended from their high places, and walked round and round each tired beast.

As many wretched animals simply crawl to this spot to die, the crows, from long experience and constant practice, can form a pretty correct diagnosis upon the case of a sick camel; they had evidently paid a professional visit to my caravan, and were especially attentive in studying the case of one particular camel that was in a very weakly condition and had stretched itself full length upon the sand; nor would they leave it until it was driven forward.

The heat of Moorahd was terrific; there was no shade of any kind, and the narrow valley surrounded by glowing rocks formed a natural oven. The intense dryness of the overheated atmosphere was such, that many of our water-skins that appeared full were nearly empty; the precious supply had evaporated through the porous leather, and the skins were simply distended by the expanded air within. Fortunately I had taken about 108 gallons from Korosko, and I possessed a grand reserve in my two barrels which could not waste; these were invaluable as a resource when the supply in the skins should be exhausted. My Arab camel-men were supposed to be provided with their own private supply; but, as they had calculated upon stealing from my stock, in which they were disappointed, they were on exceedingly short allowance, and were suffering much from thirst. During our forced march of three days and a half it had been impossible to perform the

usual toilette, therefore, as water was life, washing had been out of the question. Moorahd had been looked forward to as the spot of six hours' rest, where we could indulge in the luxury of a bath on a limited scale after the heat and fatigue of the journey. Accordingly, about two quarts of water were measured into a large Turkish copper basin; the tent, although the heat was unendurable, was the only dressing-room, and the two quarts of water, with a due proportion of soap, having washed two people, was about to be thrown away, when the Arab guide, who had been waiting his opportunity, snatched the basin from the servant, and in the agony of thirst drank nearly the whole of its contents, handing the residue to a brother Arab, with the hearty ejaculation, "El hambd el Illah!" (Thank God!)

My wife was seriously ill from the fatigue and intense heat, but there can be no halt in the desert; dead or alive, with the caravan you must travel, as the party depends upon the supply of water. A few extracts verbatim from my journal will describe the journey:—

"May 2O.—Started at 12.30 P.M. and halted at 6.30. Off again at 7.30 P.M. till 2.45 A.M. About four miles from Moorahd, grey granite takes the place of the volcanic slag and schist that formed the rocks to that point. The desert is now a vast plain, bounded by a range of rugged hills on the south. On the north side of Moorahd, at a distance of above eight miles, slate is met with; this continues for about three miles of the route, but it is of impure quality, with the exception of one vein, of a

beautiful blue colour. A few miserable stunted thorny mimosas are here to be seen scattered irregularly, as though lost in this horrible desert."

Many years ago, when the Egyptian troops first conquered Nubia, a regiment was destroyed by thirst in crossing this desert. The men, being upon a limited allowance of water, suffered from extreme thirst, and deceived by the appearance of a mirage that exactly resembled a beautiful lake, they insisted on being taken to its banks by the Arab guide. It was in vain that the guide assured them that the lake was unreal, and he refused to lose the precious time by wandering from his course. Words led to blows, and he was killed by the soldiers, whose lives depended upon his guidance. The whole regiment turned from the track and rushed towards the welcome waters. Thirsty and faint, over the burning sands they hurried; heavier and heavier their footsteps became —hotter and hotter their breath, as deeper they pushed into the desert—farther and farther from the lost track where the pilot lay in his blood; and still the mocking spirits of the desert, the afreets of the mirage, led them on, and the lake glistening in the sunshine tempted them to bathe in its cool waters, close to their eyes, but never at their lips. At length the delusion vanished —the fatal lake had turned to burning sand! Raging thirst and horrible despair! the pathless desert and the murdered guide! lost! lost! all lost! Not a man ever left the desert, but they were subsequently discovered, parched and withered corpses, by the Arabs sent upon the search.

"May 21.—Started at 5.45 A.M. till 8.45; again, at 1.45 P.M. till 7 P.M.; again, at 9.30 P.M. till 4 A.M. Saw two gazelles, the first living creatures, except the crows at Moorahd, that we have seen since we left Korosko; there must be a supply of water in the mountains known only to these animals. Thermometer, 111 degrees Fahr. in the shade; at night, 78 degrees. The water in the leather bottle that I repaired is deliciously cool. N.B.—In sewing leather bottles or skins for holding water, no thread should be used, but a leathern thong, which should be dry; it will then swell when wetted, and the seam will be watertight.

"May 22.—Started at 5.30 A.M. till 9.30; again, at 2.15 P.M. till 7.15 P.M. Rested to dine, and started again at 8.30 P.M. till 4.25 A.M.; reaching Abou Hammed, thank heaven!

"Yesterday evening we passed through a second chain of rugged hills of grey granite, about 600 feet high, and descended through a pass to an extensive plain, in which rose abruptly, like huge pyramids, four granite hills, at great distances apart. So exactly do they resemble artificial pyramids at a distance, that it is difficult to believe they are natural objects. I feel persuaded that the ancient Egyptians took their designs for monuments and buildings from the hills themselves, and raised in the plains of Lower Egypt artificial pyramids in imitation of the granite hills of this form. Their temples were in form like many of the granite ranges, and were thoroughly encased with stone. The extraordinary massiveness of these works suggests that Nature assisted the design; the stone columns are imitations of the date

palms, and the buildings are copies of the rocky hills—the two common features of Egyptian scenery.

"Throughout the route from Korosko, the skeletons of camels number about eight per mile, with the exception of the last march on either side of the watering-place Moorahd, on which there are double that number, as the animals have become exhausted as they approach the well. In the steep pass through the hills, where the heat is intense, and the sand deep, the mortality is dreadful; in some places I counted six and eight in a heap; and this difficult portion of the route is a mass of bones, as every weak animal gives in at the trying place.

"So dreadful a desert is this between Korosko and Abou Hammed, that Said Pasha ordered the route to be closed; but it was re-opened upon the application of foreign consuls, as the most direct road to the Soudan. Our Bishareen Arabs are first-rate walkers, as they have performed the entire journey on foot. Their water and provisions were all exhausted yesterday, but fortunately I had guarded the key of my two water-casks; thus I had a supply when every water-skin was empty, and on the last day I divided my sacred stock amongst the men, and the still more thirsty camels. In the hot months, a camel cannot march longer than three days without drinking, unless at the cost of great suffering.

"Having arrived here (Abou Hammed) at 4.25 this morning, 23d May, I had the luxury of a bath. The very sight of the Nile was delightful, after the parched desolation of the last seven days.

The small village is utterly destitute of everything, and the sterile desert extends to the very margin of the Nile. The journey having occupied ninety-two hours of actual marching across the desert, gives 230 miles as the distance from Korosko, at the loaded-camel rate of two and a half miles per hour. The average duration of daily march has been upwards of thirteen hours, including a day's halt at Moorahd. My camels have arrived in tolerable condition, as their loads did not exceed 400 lbs. each; the usual load is 500 lbs.

"May 24.—Rested both men and beasts. A caravan of about thirty camels arrived, having lost three during the route.

"May 25.—Started at 5 A.M. The route is along the margin of the Nile, to which the desert extends. A fringe of stunted bushes, and groves of the coarse and inelegant dome palm, mark the banks of the river by a thicket of about half a mile in width. I saw many gazelles, and succeeded in stalking a fine buck, and killing him with a rifle.

"May 26.—Marched ten hours. Saw gazelles, but so wild that it was impossible to shoot. Thermometer 110 degrees Fahr.

"May 27.—Marched four hours and forty-five minutes, when we were obliged to halt, as F. is very ill. In the evening I shot two gazelles, which kept the party in meat.

"May 28.—Marched fifteen hours, to make up for the delay of yesterday. Shot a buck on the route.

"May 29.—The march of yesterday cut off an angle of the river, and we made a straight course through the desert, avoiding

a bend of the stream. At 7.30 this morning we met the Nile again; the same character of country as before, the river full of rocks, and forming a succession of rapids the entire distance from Abou Hammed. Navigation at this season is impossible, and is most dangerous even at flood-time. The simoom is fearful, and the heat is so intense that it was impossible to draw the gun-cases out of their leather covers, which it was necessary to cut open. All woodwork is warped; ivory knife-handles are split; paper breaks when crunched in the hand, and the very marrow seems to be dried out of the bones by this horrible simoom. One of our camels fell down to die. Shot two buck gazelles; I saw many, but they are very wild.

"May 3O.—The extreme dryness of the air induces an extraordinary amount of electricity in the hair, and in all woollen materials. A Scotch plaid laid upon a blanket for a few hours adheres to it, and upon being roughly withdrawn at night a sheet of flame is produced, accompanied by tolerably loud reports.

"May 31.—After an early march of three hours and twenty minutes, we arrived at the town of Berber, on the Nile, at 9.35 A.M. We have been fifty-seven hours and five minutes actually marching from Abou Hammed, which, at two and a half miles per hour, equals 143 miles. We have thus marched 373 miles from Korosko to Berber in fifteen days; the entire route is the monotonous Nubian desert. Our camels have averaged twenty-five miles per day, with loads of 400 lbs. at a cost of ninety piastres (about 19s.) each, for the whole distance. This

rate, with the addition of the guide's expenses, equals about 5s. 6d. per 100 lbs. for carriage throughout 373 miles of burning desert. Although this frightful country appears to be cut off from all communication with the world, the extremely low rate of transport charges affords great facility for commerce."[1]

Berber is a large town, and in appearance is similar to the Nile towns of Lower Egypt, consisting of the usual dusty, unpaved streets, and flat-roofed houses of sun-baked bricks. It is the seat of a Governor, or Mudir, and is generally the quarters for about 1,500 troops. We were very kindly received by Halleem Effendi, the ex-Governor, who at once gave us permission to pitch the tents in his garden, close to the Nile, on the southern outskirt of the town. After fifteen days of desert marching, the sight of a well-cultivated garden was an Eden in our eyes. About eight acres of land, on the margin of the river, were thickly planted with lofty date groves, and shady citron and lemon trees, beneath which we revelled in luxury on our Persian rugs, and enjoyed complete rest after the fatigue of our long journey. Countless birds were chirping and singing in the trees above us; innumerable ring-doves were cooing in the shady palms; and the sudden change from the dead sterility of the desert to the scene of verdure and of life, produced an extraordinary effect upon the spirits. What caused this curious transition? Why should this charming

[1] Since that date, 31st May, 1861, the epidemic or cattle plague carried off an immense number of camels, and the charges of transport rose in 1864 and 1865 to a rate that completely paralysed the trade of Upper Egypt.

oasis, teeming with vegetation and with life, be found in the yellow, sandy desert? . . . Water had worked this change; the spirit of the Nile, more potent than any genii of the Arabian fables, had transformed the desert into a fruitful garden. Halleem Effendi, the former Governor, had, many years ago, planted this garden, irrigated by numerous water-wheels; and we now enjoyed the fruits, and thanked Heaven for its greatest blessings in that burning land, shade and cool water.

The tents were soon arranged, the camels were paid for and discharged, and in the cool of the evening we were visited by the Governor and suite.

The firman having been officially presented by the dragoman upon our arrival in the morning, the Governor had called with much civility to inquire into our projects and to offer assistance. We were shortly seated on carpets outside the tent, and after pipes and coffee, and the usual preliminary compliments, my dragoman explained, that the main object of our journey was to search for the sources of the Nile, or, as he described it, "the head of the river."

Both the Governor and Halleem Effendi, with many officers who had accompanied them, were Turks; but, in spite of the gravity and solidity for which the Turk is renowned, their faces relaxed into a variety of expressions at this (to them) absurd announcement. "The head of the Nile!" they exclaimed, "impossible!" "Do they know where it is?" inquired the Governor, of the dragoman; and upon an explanation being

given, that, as we did not know where it was, we had proposed to discover it, the Turks merely shook their heads, sipped their coffee, and took extra whiffs at their long pipes, until at length the white- haired old Halleem Effendi spoke. He gave good and parental advice, as follows:—

"Don't go upon so absurd an errand; nobody knows anything about the Nile, neither will any one discover its source. We do not even know the source of the Atbara; how should we know the source of the great Nile. A great portion of the Atbara flows through the Pasha of Egypt's dominions; the firman in your possession with his signature, will insure you respect, so long as you remain within his territory; but if you cross his frontier, you will be in the hands of savages. The White Nile is the country of the negroes; wild, ferocious races who have neither knowledge of God nor respect for the Pasha, and you must travel with a powerful armed force; the climate is deadly; how could you penetrate such a region to search for what is useless even should you attain it? But how would it be possible for a lady, young and delicate, to endure what would kill the strongest man? Travel along the Atbara river into the Taka country, there is much to be seen that is unexplored; but give up the mad scheme of the Nile source."

There was some sense in old Halleem Effendi's advice; it was the cool and cautious wisdom of old age, but as I was not so elderly, I took it "cum grano salis." He was a charming old gentleman, the perfect beau ideal of the true old style of Turk,

but few specimens of which remain; all that he had said was spoken in sincerity, and I resolved to collect as much information as possible from the grey-headed authorities before I should commence the expedition. I was deeply impressed with one fact, that until I could dispense with an interpreter it would be impossible to succeed, therefore I determined to learn Arabic as speedily as possible.

A week's rest in the garden of Halleem Effendi prepared us for the journey. I resolved to explore the Atbara river and the Abyssinian affluents, prior to commencing the White Nile voyage. The Governor promised me two Turkish soldiers as attendants, and I arranged to send my heavy baggage by boat to Khartoum, and secure the advantage of travelling light; a comfort that no one can appreciate who has not felt the daily delay in loading a long string of camels. Both my wife and I had suffered from a short attack of fever brought on by the prostrating effect of the simoom, which at this season (June) was at its height. The Nile was slowly rising, although it was still low; occasionally it fell about eighteen inches in one night, but again rose; this proved that, although the rains had commenced, they were not constant, as the steady and rapid increase of the river had not taken place. The authorities assured me that the Blue Nile was now rising at Khartoum, which accounted for the increase of the river at Berber.

The garden of Halleem Effendi was attended by a number of fine powerful slaves from the White Nile, whose stout frames

and glossy skins were undeniable witnesses of their master's care. A charmingly pretty slave girl paid us daily visits, with presents of fruit from her kind master and numerous mistresses, who, with the usual Turkish compliments as a preliminary message, requested permission to visit the English lady.

In the cool hour of evening a bevy of ladies approached through the dark groves of citron trees, so gaily dressed in silks of the brightest dyes of yellow, blue, and scarlet, that no bouquet of flowers could have been more gaudy. They were attended by numerous slaves, and the head servant politely requested me to withdraw during the interview. Thus turned out of my tent, I was compelled to patience and solitude beneath a neighbouring date palm.

The result of the interview with my wife was most satisfactory; the usual womanish questions had been replied to, and hosts of compliments exchanged. We were then rich in all kinds of European trifles that excited their curiosity, and a few little presents established so great an amount of confidence that they gave the individual history of each member of the family from childhood, that would have filled a column of the Times with births, deaths, and marriages.

Some of these ladies were very young and pretty, and of course exercised a certain influence over their husbands; thus, on the following morning, we were inundated with visitors, as the male members of the family came to thank us for the manner in which their ladies had been received; and fruit, flowers, and the

general produce of the garden were presented to us in profusion. However pleasant, there were drawbacks to our garden of Eden; there was dust in our Paradise; not the dust that we see in Europe upon unwatered roads, that simply fills the eyes, but sudden clouds raised by whirlwinds in the desert which fairly choked the ears and nostrils when thus attacked. June is the season when these phenomena are most prevalent. At that time the rains have commenced in the south, and are extending towards the north; the cold and heavy air of the southern rain-clouds sweeps down upon the overheated atmosphere of the desert, and produces sudden violent squalls and whirlwinds when least expected, as at that time the sky is cloudless.

The effect of these desert whirlwinds is most curious, as their force is sufficient to raise dense columns of sand and dust several thousand feet high; these are not the evanescent creations of a changing wind, but they frequently exist for many hours, and travel forward, or more usually in circles, resembling in the distance solid pillars of sand. The Arab superstition invests these appearances with the supernatural, and the mysterious sand-column of the desert wandering in its burning solitude, is an evil spirit, a "Gin" ("genii" plural, of the Arabian Nights). I have frequently seen many such columns at the same time in the boundless desert, all travelling or waltzing in various directions at the wilful choice of each whirlwind: this vagrancy of character is an undoubted proof to the Arab mind of their independent and diabolical origin.

The Abyssinian traveller, Bruce, appears to have entertained a peculiar dread of the dangers of such sand columns, but on this point his fear was exaggerated. Cases may have occurred where caravans have been suffocated by whirlwinds of sand, but these are rare exceptions, and the usual effects of the dust storm are the unroofing of thatched huts, the destruction of a few date palms, and the disagreeable amount of sand that not only half chokes both man and beast, but buries all objects that may be lying on the ground some inches deep in dust.

The wind at this season (June) was changeable, and strong blasts from the south were the harbingers of the approaching rainy season. We had no time to lose, and we accordingly arranged to start. I discharged my dirty cook, and engaged a man who was brought by a coffee-house keeper, by whom he was highly recommended; but, as a precaution against deception, I led him before the Mudir, or Governor, to be registered before our departure. To my astonishment, and to his infinite disgust, he was immediately recognised as an old offender, who had formerly been imprisoned for theft! The Governor, to prove his friendship, and his interest in my welfare, immediately sent the police to capture the coffee-house keeper who had recommended the cook. No sooner was the unlucky surety brought to the Divan than he was condemned to receive 200 lashes for having given a false character. The sentence was literally carried out, in spite of my remonstrance, and the police were ordered to make the case public to prevent a recurrence. The Governor assured me, that as

I held a firman from the Viceroy he could not do otherwise, and that I must believe him to be my truest friend. "Save me from my friends," was an adage quickly proved. I could not procure a cook, neither any other attendants, as every one was afraid to guarantee a character, lest he might come in for his share of the 200 lashes!

The Governor came to my rescue, and sent immediately the promised Turkish soldiers, who were to act in the double capacity of escort and servants. They were men of totally opposite characters. Hadji Achmet was a hardy, powerful, dare-devil-looking Turk, while Hadji Velli was the perfection of politeness, and as gentle as a lamb. My new allies procured me three donkeys in addition to the necessary baggage camels, and we started from the pleasant garden of Halleem Effendi on the evening of the 10th of June for the junction of the Atbara river with the Nile.

CHAPTER II

"'Mongst them were several Englishmen of pith,
Sixteen named Thompson, and nineteen named Smith."

DON JUAN.

MAHOMET, Achmet, and Ali are equivalent to Smith, Brown, and Thompson. Accordingly, of my few attendants, my dragoman was Mahomet, and my principal guide was Achmet; and subsequently I had a number of Alis. Mahomet was a regular Cairo dragoman, a native of Dongola, almost black, but exceedingly tenacious regarding his shade of colour, which he declared to be light brown. He spoke very bad English, was excessively conceited, and irascible to a degree. No pasha was so bumptious or overbearing to his inferiors, but to me and to his mistress while in Cairo he had the gentleness of the dove, and I had engaged him at 5l. per month to accompany me to the White Nile. Men change with circumstances; climate affects the health and temper; the sleek and well-fed dog is amiable, but he would be vicious when thin and hungry; the man in luxury and the man in need are not equally angelic. Now Mahomet was one of those dragomen who are accustomed to the civilized expeditions of the British tourist to the first or second cataract, in a Nile boat replete with conveniences and luxuries, upon which

the dragoman is monarch supreme, a whale among the minnows, who rules the vessel, purchases daily a host of unnecessary supplies, upon which he clears his profit, until he returns to Cairo with his pockets filled sufficiently to support him until the following Nile season. The short three months' harvest, from November until February, fills his granary for the year. Under such circumstances the temper should be angelic. But times had changed: the luxurious Mahomet had left the comfortable Nile boat at Korosko, and he had crossed the burning desert upon a jolting camel; he had left the well-known route where the dragoman was supreme, and he found himself among people who treated him in the light of a common servant. "A change came o'er the spirit of his dream;" Mahomet was no longer a great man, and his temper changed with circumstances; in fact, Mahomet became unbearable, and still he was absolutely necessary, as he was the tongue of the expedition until we should accomplish Arabic. To him the very idea of exploration was an absurdity; he had never believed in it from the first, and he now became impressed with the fact that he was positively committed to an undertaking that would end most likely in his death, if not in terrible difficulties; he determined, under the circumstances, to make himself as disagreeable as possible to all parties. With this amiable resolution Mahomet adopted a physical infirmity in the shape of deafness; in reality, no one was more acute in hearing, but as there are no bells where there are no houses, he of course could not answer such a summons, and he was

compelled to attend to the call of his own name—"Mahomet! Mahomet!" No reply, although the individual was sitting within a few feet, apparently absorbed in the contemplation of his own boots. "Mahomet!" with an additional emphasis upon the second syllable. Again no response. "Mahomet, you rascal, why don't you answer?" This energetic address would effect a change in his position; the mild and lamb-like dragoman of Cairo would suddenly start from the ground, tear his own hair from his head in handfuls, and shout, "Mahomet! Mahomet! Mahomet! always Mahomet! D—n Mahomet! I wish he were dead, or back in Cairo, this brute Mahomet!" The irascible dragoman would then beat his own head unmercifully with his fists, in a paroxysm of rage.

To comfort him I could only exclaim, "Well done, Mahomet! thrash him; pommel him well; punch his head; you know him best; he deserves it; don't spare him!" This advice, acting upon the natural perversity of his disposition, generally soothed him, and he ceased punching his head. This man was entirely out of his place, if not out of his mind, at certain moments, and having upon one occasion smashed a basin by throwing it in the face of the cook, and upon another occasion narrowly escaped homicide, by throwing an axe at a man's head, which missed by an inch, he became a notorious character in the little expedition.

We left Berber in the evening at sunset; we were mounted upon donkeys, while our Turkish attendants rode upon excellent dromedaries that belonged to their regiment of irregular cavalry.

As usual, when ready to start, Mahomet was the last; he had piled a huge mass of bags and various luggage upon his donkey, that almost obscured the animal, and he sat mounted upon this pinnacle dressed in gorgeous clothes, with a brace of handsome pistols in his belt, and his gun slung across his shoulders. Upon my remonstrating with him upon the cruelty of thus overloading the donkey, he flew into a fit of rage, and dismounting immediately, he drew his pistols from his belt and dashed them upon the ground; his gun shared the same fate, and heaving his weapons upon the sand, he sullenly walked behind his donkey, which he drove forward with the caravan.

We pushed forward at the usual rapid amble of the donkeys; and, accompanied by Hadji Achmet upon his dromedary, with the coffee-pot, &c. and a large Persian rug slung behind the saddle, we quickly distanced the slower caravan under the charge of Hadji Velli and the sullen Mahomet.

There was no difficulty in the route, as the sterile desert of sand and pebbles was bounded by a fringe of bush amid mimosa that marked the course of the Nile, to which our way lay parallel. There was no object to attract particular attention, and no sound but that of the bleating goats driven homeward by the Arab boys, and the sharp cry of the desert sand grouse as they arrived in flocks to drink in the welcome river. The flight of these birds is extremely rapid, and is more like that of the pigeon than the grouse; they inhabit the desert, but they travel great distances both night and morning to water, as they invariably drink twice

a day. As they approach the river they utter the cry "Chuckow, chuckow," in a loud clear note, and immediately after drinking they return upon their long flight to the desert. There are several varieties of the sand grouse. I have met with three, but they are dry, tough, and worthless as game.

We slept in the desert about five miles from Berber, and on the following day, after a scorching march of about twenty miles, we arrived at the junction of the Atbara river with the Nile. Throughout the route the barren sand stretched to the horizon on the left, while on the right, within a mile of the Nile, the soil was sufficiently rich to support a certain amount of vegetation—chiefly dwarf mimosas and the Asclepias gigantea. The latter I had frequently seen in Ceylon, where it is used medicinally by the native doctors; but here it was ignored, except for the produce of a beautiful silky down which is used for stuffing cushions and pillows. This vegetable silk is contained in a soft pod or bladder about the size of an orange. Both the leaves and the stem of this plant emit a highly poisonous milk, that exudes from the bark when cut or bruised; the least drop of this will cause total blindness, if in contact with the eye. I have seen several instances of acute ophthalmia that have terminated in loss of sight from the accidental rubbing of the eye with the hand when engaged in cutting firewood from the asclepias. The wood is extremely light, and is frequently tied into fagots and used by the Arabs as a support while swimming, in lieu of cork. Although the poisonous qualities of the plant cause it to be shunned by all other animals, it

is nevertheless greedily devoured by goats, who eat it unharmed.

It was about two hours after sunset when we arrived at the steep bank of the Atbara river. Pushing through the fringe of young dome palms that formed a thick covert upon the margin, we cautiously descended the bank for about twenty-five feet, as the bright glare of the river's bed deceived me by the resemblance to water. We found a broad surface of white sand, which at that season formed the dry bed of the river. Crossing this arid bottom of about 400 yards in width, we unsaddled on the opposite side, by a bed of water melons planted near a small pool of water. A few of these we chopped in pieces for our tired donkeys, and we shared in the cool and welcome luxury ourselves that was most refreshing after the fatigue of the day's journey. Long before our camels arrived, we had drunk our coffee and were sound asleep upon the sandy bed of the Atbara.

At daybreak on the following morning, while the camels were being loaded, I strolled to a small pool in the sand, tempted by a couple of wild geese; these were sufficiently unsophisticated as to allow me to approach within shot, and I bagged them both, and secured our breakfast; they were the common Egyptian geese, which are not very delicate eating. The donkeys being saddled, we at once started with our attendant, Hadji Achmet, at about five miles per hour, in advance of our slower caravan. The route was upon the river's margin, due east, through a sandy copse of thorny mimosas which fringed the river's course for about a quarter of a mile on either side; beyond this all was desert.

The Atbara had a curious appearance; in no part was it less than 400 yards in width, while in many places this breadth was much exceeded. The banks were from twenty-five to thirty feet deep: these had evidently been over-flowed during floods, bnt at the present time the river was dead; not only partially dry, but so glaring was the sandy bed, that the reflection of the sun was almost unbearable.

Great numbers of the dome palm (Hyphoene Thebaica, Mart.) grew upon the banks; these trees are of great service to the Arab tribes, who at this season of drought forsake the deserts and flock upon the margin of the Atbara. The leaves of the dome supply them with excellent material for mats and ropes, while the fruit is used both for man and beast. The dome palm resembles the palmyra in the form and texture of its fan-shaped leaves, but there is a distinguishing peculiarity in the growth: instead of the straight single stem of the palmyra, the dome palm spreads into branches, each of which invariably represents the letter Y. The fruit grows in dense clusters, numbering several hundred, of the size of a small orange, but of an irregular oval shape; these are of a rich brown colour, and bear a natural polish as though varnished. So hard is the fruit and uninviting to the teeth, that a deal board would be equally practicable for mastication; the Arabs pound them between stones, by which rough process they detach the edible portion in the form of a resinous powder. The rind of the nut which produces this powder is about a quarter of an inch thick; this coating covers a strong shell which contains

a nut of vegetable ivory, a little larger than a full-sized walnut. When the resinous powder is detached, it is either eaten raw, or it is boiled into a delicious porridge, with milk; this has a strong flavour of gingerbread.

The vegetable ivory nuts are then soaked in water for about twenty-four hours, after which they are heaped in large piles upon a fire until nearly dry, and thoroughly steamed; this process renders them sufficiently tractable to be reduced by pounding in a heavy mortar. Thus, broken into small pieces they somewhat resemble half-roasted chestnuts, and in this state they form excellent food for cattle. The useful dome palm is the chief support of the desert Arabs when in times of drought and scarcity the supply of corn has failed. At this season (June) there was not a blade of even the withered grass of the desert oases. Our donkeys lived exclusively upon the dhurra (Sorghum Egyptiaca) that we carried with us, and the camels required a daily supply of corn in addition to the dry twigs and bushes that formed their dusty food. The margin of the river was miserable and uninviting; the trees and bushes were entirely leafless from the intense heat, as are the trees in England during winter. The only shade was afforded by the evergreen dome palms; nevertheless, the Arabs occupied the banks at intervals of three or four miles, wherever a pool of water in some deep bend of the dried river's bed offered an attraction; in such places were Arab villages or camps, of the usual mat tents formed of the dome palm leaves.

Many pools were of considerable size and of great depth. In

flood-time a tremendous torrent sweeps down the course of the Atbara, and the sudden bends of the river are hollowed out by the force of the stream to a depth of twenty or thirty feet below the level of the bed. Accordingly these holes become reservoirs of water when the river is otherwise exhausted. In such asylums all the usual inhabitants of this large river are crowded together in a comparatively narrow space. Although these pools vary in size, from only a few hundred yards to a mile in length, they are positively full of life; huge fish, crocodiles of immense size, turtles, and occasionally hippopotami, consort together in close and unwished-for proximity.

The animals of the desert—gazelles, hyaenas, and wild asses—are compelled to resort to these crowded drinking-places, occupied by the flocks of the Arabs equally with the timid beasts of the chase. The birds that during the cooler months would wander free throughout the country, are now collected in vast numbers along the margin of the exhausted river; innumerable doves, varying in species, throng the trees and seek the shade of the dome palms; thousands of desert grouse arrive morning and evening to drink and to depart; while birds in multitudes, of lovely plumage, escape from the burning desert, and colonize the poor but welcome bushes that fringe the Atbara river.

The heat was intense. As we travelled along the margin of the Atbara, and felt with the suffering animals the exhaustion of the clinmate, I acknowledged the grandeur of the Nile that could overcome the absorption of such thirsty sands, and the

evaporation caused by the burning atmosphere of Nubia. For nearly 1,200 miles from the junction of the Atbara with the parent stream to the Mediterranean, not one streamlet joined the mysterious river, neither one drop of rain ruffled its waters, unless a rare thunder-shower, as a curious phenomenon, startled the Arabs as they travelled along the desert. Nevertheless the Nile overcame its enemies, while the Atbara shrank to a skeleton, bare and exhausted, reduced to a few pools that lay like blotches along the broad surface of glowing sand.

Notwithstanding the overpowering sun, there were certain advantages to the traveller at this season; it was unnecessary to carry a large supply of water, as it could be obtained at intervals of a few miles. There was an indescribable delight in the cool night, when, in the perfect certainty of fine weather, we could rest in the open air with the clear bright starlit sky above us. There were no mosquitoes, neither were there any of the insect plagues of the tropics; the air was too dry for the gnat tribe, and the moment of sunset was the signal for perfect enjoyment, free from the usual drawbacks of African travel. As the river pools were the only drinking-places for birds and game, the gun supplied not only my own party, but I had much to give away to the Arabs in exchange for goat's milk, the meal of the dome nuts, &c. Gazelles were exceedingly numerous, but shy, and so difficult to approach that they required most careful stalking. At this season of intense heat they drank twice a day—at about an hour after sunrise, and half an hour before sunset.

The great comfort of travelling along the bank of the river in a desert country is the perfect freedom, as a continual supply of water enables the explorer to rest at his leisure in any attractive spot where game is plentiful, or where the natural features of the country invite investigation. We accordingly halted, after some days' journey, at a spot named Collodabad, where an angle of the river had left a deep pool of about a mile in length: this was the largest sheet of water that we had seen throughout the course of the Atbara. A number of Arabs had congregated at this spot with their flocks and herds; the total absence of verdure had reduced the animals to extreme leanness, as the goats gathered their scanty sustenance from the seed-pods of the mimosas, which were shaken down to the expectant flocks by the Arab boys, with long hooked poles. These seeds were extremely oily, and resembled linseed, but the rank flavour was disagreeable and acrid.

This spot was seven days' march from the Nile junction, or about 160 miles. The journey had been extremely monotonous, as there had been no change in the scenery; it was the interminable desert, with the solitary streak of vegetation in the belt of mimosas and dome palms, about a mile and a half in width, that marked the course of the river. I had daily shot gazelles, geese, pigeons, desert grouse, &c. but no larger game. I was informed that at this spot, Collodabad, I should be introduced for the first time to the hippopotamus.

Owing to the total absence of nourishing food, the cattle

produced a scanty supply of milk; thus the Arabs, who depended chiefly upon their flocks for their subsistence, were in great distress, and men and beasts mutually suffered extreme hardship. The Arabs that occupy the desert north of the Atbara are the Bishareens; it was among a large concourse of these people that we pitched our tents on the banks of the river at Collodabad.

This being the principal watering-place along the deserted bed of the Atbara, the neighbourhood literally swarmed with doves, sand grouse, and other birds, in addition to many geese and pelicans.

Early in the morning I procured an Arab guide to search for the reported hippopotami. My tents were among a grove of dome palms on the margin of the river; thus I had a clear view of the bed for a distance of about half a mile on either side. This portion of the Atbara was about 500 yards in width, the banks were about thirty feet perpendicular depth; and the bend of the river had caused the formation of the deep hollow on the opposite side which now formed the pool, while every other part was dry. This pool occupied about one-third the breadth of the river, bounded by the sand upon one side, and by a perpendicular cliff upon the other, upon which grew a fringe of green bushes similar to willows. These were the only succulent leaves that I had seen since I left Berber.

We descended the steep sandy bank in a spot that the Arabs had broken down to reach the water, and after trudging across about 400 yards of deep sand, we reached the extreme and

narrowest end of the pool; here for the first time I saw the peculiar four-toed print of the hippopotamus's foot. A bed of melons had been planted here by the Arabs in the moist sand near the water, but the fruit had been entirely robbed by the hippopotami. A melon is exactly adapted for the mouth of this animal, as he could crunch the largest at one squeeze, and revel in the juice. Not contented with the simple fruits of the garden, a large bull hippopotamus had recently killed the proprietor. The Arab wished to drive it from his plantation, but was immediately attacked by the hippo, who caught him in its mouth and killed him by one crunch. This little incident had rendered the hippo exceedingly daring, and it had upon several occasions charged out of the water, when the people had driven their goats to drink; therefore it would be the more satisfactory to obtain a shot, and to supply the hungry Arabs with meat at the expense of their enemy.

At this early hour, 6 A.M., no one had descended to the pool, thus all the tracks upon the margin were fresh and undisturbed: there were the huge marks of crocodiles that had recently returned to the water, while many of great size were still lying upon the sand in the distance: these slowly crept into the pool as we approached. The Arabs had dug small holes in the sand within a few yards of the water: these were the artificial drinking-places for their goats and sheep, that would have been snapped up by the crocodiles had they ventured to drink in the pool of crowded monsters. I walked for about a mile and a half along the sand without seeing a sign of hippopotami, except their numerous

tracks upon the margin. There was no wind, and the surface of the water was unruffled; thus I could see every creature that rose in the pool either to breathe or to bask in the morning sunshine. The number and size of the fish, turtles, and crocodiles were extraordinary; many beautiful gazelles approached from all sides for their morning draught: wild geese, generally in pairs, disturbed the wary crocodiles by their cry of alarm as we drew near, and the desert grouse in flocks of many thousands had gathered together, and were circling in a rapid flight above the water, wishing, but afraid, to descend and drink. Having a shot gun with me, I fired and killed six at one discharge, but one of the wounded birds having fallen into the water at a distance of about 120 yards, it was immediately seized by a white-throated fish-eagle, which perched upon a tree, swooped down upon the bird, utterly disregarding the report of the gun. The Bishareen Arabs have no fire-arms, thus the sound of a gun was unknown to the game of the desert.

I had killed several wild geese for breakfast in the absence of the hippopotami, when I suddenly heard the peculiar loud snorting neigh of these animals in my rear; we had passed them unperceived, as they had been beneath the surface. After a quick walk of about half a mile, during which time the cry of the hippos had been several times repeated, I observed six of these curious animals standing in the water about shoulder-deep. There was no cover, therefore I could only advance upon the sand without a chance of stalking them; this caused them to retreat to deeper

water, but upon my arrival within about eighty yards, they raised their heads well up, and snorted an impudent challenge. I had my old Ceylon No. 10 double rifle, and, taking a steady aim at the temple of one that appeared to be the largest, the ball cracked loudly upon the skull. Never had there been such a commotion in the pool as now! At the report of the rifle, five heads sank and disappeared like stones, but the sixth hippo leaped half out of the water, and, falling backwards, commenced a series of violent struggles: now upon his back; then upon one side, with all four legs frantically paddling, and raising a cloud of spray and foam; then waltzing round and round with its huge jaws wide open, raising a swell in the hitherto calm surface of the water. A quick shot with the left-hand barrel produced no effect, as the movements of the animal were too rapid to allow a steady aim at the forehead; I accordingly took my trmisty little Fletcher[2] double rifle No. 24, and, running knee-deep into the water to obtain a close shot, I fired exactly between the eyes, near the crown of the head. At the report of the little Fletcher the hippo disappeared; the tiny waves raised by the commotion broke upon the sand, but the game was gone.

This being my first vis-a-vis with a hippo, I was not certain whether I could claim the victory; he was gone, but where? However, while I was speculating upon the case, I heard a

[2] This excellent and handy rifle was made by Thomas Fletcher, of Gloucester, and accompanied me like a faithful dog throughout my journey of nearly five years to the Albert N'yanza, and returned with me to England as good as new.

tremendous rush of water, and I saw five hippopotami tearing along in full trot through a portion of the pool that was not deep enough to cover them above the shoulder: this was the affair of about half a minute, as they quickly reached deep water, and disappeared at about a hundred and fifty yards' distance.

The fact of five hippos in retreat after I had counted six in the onset was conclusive that my waltzing friend was either dead or disabled; I accordingly lost no time in following the direction of the herd. Hardly had I arrived at the spot where they had disappeared, when first one and then another head popped up and again sank, until one more hardy than the rest ventured to appear within fifty yards, and to bellow as before. Once more the No. 10 crashed through his head, and again the waltzing and struggling commenced like the paddling of a steamer: this time, however, the stunned hippo in its convulsive efforts came so close to the shore that I killed it directly in shallow water, by a forehead shot with the little Fletcher. I concluded from this result that my first hippo must also be lying dead in deep water.

The Arabs, having heard the shots fired, had begun to gather towards the spot, and, upon my men shouting that a hippo was killed, crowds came running to the place with their knives and ropes, while others returned to their encampment to fetch camels and mat bags to convey the flesh. In half an hour at least three hundred Arabs were on the spot; the hippo had been hauled to shore by ropes, and, by the united efforts of the crowd, the heavy carcase had been rolled to the edge of the water. Here the

attack commenced; no pack of hungry hyaenas could have been more savage. I gave them permission to take the flesh, and in an instant a hundred knives were at work: they fought over the spoil like wolves. No sooner was the carcase flayed than the struggle commenced for the meat; the people were a mass of blood, as some stood thigh-deep in the reeking intestines wrestling for the fat, while many hacked at each other's hands for coveted portions that were striven for as a bonne bouche. I left the savage crowd in their ferocious enjoyment of flesh and blood, and I returned to camp for breakfast, my Turk, Hadji Achmet, carrying some hippopotamus steaks.

That morning my wife and I breakfasted upon our first hippo, an animal that was destined to be our general food throughout our journey among the Abyssinian tributaries of the Nile. After breakfast we strolled down to the pool to search for the hippopotamus No. 1. This we at once found, dead, as it had risen to the surface, and was floating like the back of a turtle a few inches above the water. The Arabs had been so intent upon the division of their spoil that they had not observed their new prize; accordingly, upon the signal being given, a general rush took place, and in half an hour a similar scene was enacted to that of hippo No. 2.

The entire Arab camp was in commotion and full of joy at this unlooked-for arrival of flesh. Camels laden with meat and hide toiled along the sandy bed of the river; the women raised their long and shrill cry of delight; and we were looked upon as general

benefactors for having brought them a supply of good food in this season of distress. In the afternoon I arranged my tackle, and strolled down to the pool to fish. There was a difficulty in procuring bait; a worm was never heard of in the burning deserts of Nubia, neither had I a net to catch small fish; I was therefore obliged to bait with pieces of hippopotamnus. Fishing in such a pool as that of the Atbara was sufficiently exciting, as it was impossible to speculate upon what creature might accept the invitation; but the Arabs who accompanied me were particular in guarding me against the position I had taken under a willow-bush close to the water, as they explained, that most probably a crocodile would take me instead of the bait; they declared that accidents had frequently happened when people had sat upon the bank either to drink with their hands, or even while watching their goats. I accordingly fished at a few feet distant from the margin, and presently I had a bite; I landed a species of perch about two pounds' weight; this was the "boulti," one of the best Nile fish mentioned by the traveller Bruce. In a short time I had caught a respectable dish of fish, but hitherto no monster had paid me the slightest attention; accordingly I changed my bait, and upon a powerful hook, fitted upon treble-twisted wire, I fastened an enticing strip of a boulti. The bait was about four ounces, and glistened like silver; the water was tolerably clear, but not too bright, and with such an attraction I expected something heavy. My float was a large-sized pike-float for live bait, and this civilized sign had been only a few minutes in the wild waters of

the Atbara, when, bob! and away it went! I had a very large reel, with nearly three hundred yards of line that had been specially made for monsters; down went the top of my rod, as though a grindstone was suspended on it, and, as I recovered its position, away went the line, and the reel revolved, not with the sudden dash of a spirited fish, but with the steady determined pull of a trotting horse. What on earth have I got hold of? In a few minutes about a hundred yards of line were out, and as the creature was steadily but slowly travelling down the centre of the channel, I determined to cry "halt!" if possible, as my tackle was extremely strong, and my rod was a single bamboo. Accordingly, I put on a powerful strain, which was replied to by a sullen tug, a shake, and again my rod was pulled suddenly down to the water's edge. At length, after the roughest handling, I began to reel in slack line, as my unknown friend had doubled in upon me; and upon once more putting severe pressure upon him or her, as it might be, I perceived a great swirl in the water, about twenty yards from the rod. The tackle would bear anything, and I strained so heavily upon my adversary, that I soon reduced our distance; but the water was exceedingly deep, the bank precipitous, and he was still invisible. At length, after much tugging and counter-tugging, he began to show; eagerly I gazed into the water to examine my new acquaintance, when I made out something below, in shape between a coach-wheel and a sponging-bath; in a few moments more I brought to the surface an enormous turtle, well hooked. I felt like the old lady who won an elephant in a lottery: that

I had him was certain, but what was I to do with my prize? It was at the least a hundred pounds' weight, and the bank was steep and covered with bushes; thus it was impossible to land the monster, that now tugged and dived with the determination of the grindstone that his first pull had suggested. Once I attempted the gaff but the trusty weapon that had landed many a fish in Scotland broke in the hard shell of the turtle, and I was helpless. My Arab now came to my assistance, and at once terminated the struggle. Seizing the line with both hands, utterly regardless of all remonstrance (which, being in English, he did not understand), he quickly hauled our turtle to the surface, and held it, struggling and gnashing its jaws, close to the steep bank. In a few moments the line slackened, and the turtle disappeared. The fight was over! The sharp horny jaws had bitten through treble-twisted brass wire as clean as though cut by shears. My visions of turtle soup had faded.

The heavy fish were not in the humour to take; I therefore shot one with a rifle as it came to the surface to blow, and, the water in this spot being shallow, we brought it to shore; it was a species of carp, between thirty and forty pounds; the scales were rather larger than a crown piece, and so hard that they would have been difficult to pierce with a harpoon. It proved to be useless for the table, being of an oily nature that was only acceptable to the Arabs.

In the evening I went out stalking in the desert, and returned with five fine buck gazelles. These beautiful creatures so exactly

resemble the colour of the sandy deserts which they inhabit, that they are most difficult to distinguish, and their extreme shyness renders stalking upon foot very uncertain. I accordingly employed an Arab to lead a camel, under cover of which I could generally manage to approach within a hundred yards. A buck gazelle weighs from sixty to seventy pounds, and is the perfection of muscular development. No person who has seen the gazelles in confinement in a temperate climate can form an idea of the beauty of the animal in its native desert. Born in the scorching sun, nursed on the burning sand of the treeless and shadowless wilderness, the gazelle is among the antelope tribe as the Arab horse is among its brethren, the high-bred and superlative beauty of the race. The skin is as sleek as satin, of a colour difficult to describe, as it varies between the lightest mauve and yellowish brown; the belly is snow-white; the legs, from the knee downwards, are also white, and are as fine as though carved from ivory; the hoof is beautifully shaped, and tapers to a sharp point; the head of the buck is ornamented by gracefully-curved annulated horns, perfectly black, and generally from nine to twelve inches long in the bend; the eye is the well-known perfection—the full, large, soft, and jet-black eye of the gazelle. Although the desert appears incapable of supporting animmial life, there are in the undulating surface numerous shallow sandy ravines, in which are tufts of a herbage so coarse that, as a source of nourishment, it would be valueless to a domestic animal: nevertheless, upon this dry and wiry substance

the delicate gazelles subsist; and, although they never fatten, they are exceedingly fleshy and in excellent condition. Entirely free from fat, and nevertheless a mass of muscle and sinew, the gazelle is the fastest of the antelope tribe. Proud of its strength, and confident in its agility, it will generally bound perpendicularly four or five feet from the ground several times before it starts at full speed, as though to test the quality of its sinews before the race. The Arabs course them with greyhounds, and sometimes they are caught by running several dogs at the same time; but this result is from the folly of the gazelle, who at first distances his pursuers like the wind; but, secure in its speed, it halts and faces the dogs, exhausting itself by bounding exultingly in the air; in the meantime the greyhounds are closing up, and diminishing the chance of escape. As a rule, notwithstanding this absurdity of the gazelle, it has the best of the race, and the greyhounds return crestfallen and beaten. Altogether it is the most beautiful specimen of game that exists, far too lovely and harmless to be hunted and killed for the mere love of sport. But when dinner depends upon the rifle, beauty is no protection; accordingly, throughout our desert march we lived upon gazelles, and I am sorry to confess that I became very expert at stalking these wary little animals. The flesh, although tolerably good, has a slight flavour of musk; this is not peculiar to the gazelle, as the odour is common to most of the small varieties of antelopes.

Having a good supply of meat, all hands were busily engaged in cutting it into strips and drying it for future use; the bushes

were covered with festoons of flesh of gazelles and hippopotami, and the skins of the former were prepared for making girbas, or water-sacks. The flaying process for this purpose is a delicate operation, as the knife must be so dexterously used that no false cut should injure the hide. The animal is hung up by the hind legs; an incision is then made along the inside of both thighs to the tail, and with some trouble the skin is drawn off the body towards the head, precisely as a stocking might be drawn from the leg; by this operation the skin forms a seamless bag, open at both ends. To form a girba, the skin must be buried in the earth for about twenty hours: it is then washed in water, and the hair is easily detached. Thus rendered clean, it is tanned by soaking for several days in a mixture of the bark of a mimosa and water; from this it is daily withdrawn, and stretched out with pegs upon the ground; it is then well scrubbed with a rough stone, and fresh mimosa bark well bruised, with water, is rubbed in by the friction. About four days are sufficient to tan the thin skin of a gazelle, which is much valued for its toughness and durability; the aperture at the hind quarters is sewn together, and the opening of the neck is closed, when required, by tying. A good water-skin should be porous, to allow the water to exude sufficiently to moisten the exterior: thus the action of the air upon the exposed surface causes evaporation, and imparts to the water within the skin a delicious coolness. The Arabs usually prepare their tanned skins with an empyreumatical oil made from a variety of substances, the best of which is that from the sesame grain; this has a powerful smell, and renders the

water so disagreeable that few Europeans could drink it. This oil is black, and much resembles tar in appearance; it has the effect of preserving the leather, and of rendering it perfectly water-tight. In desert travelling each person should have his own private water-skin slung upon his dromedary; for this purpose none are so good as a small-sized gazelle skin that will contain about two gallons.

On the 23d June we were nearly suffocated by a whirlwind that buried everything within the tents several inches in dust; the heat was intense; as usual the sky was spotless, but the simoom was more overpowering than I had yet experienced. I accordingly took my rifle and went down to the pool, as any movement, even in the burning sun, was preferable to inaction in that sultry heat and dust. The crocodiles had dragged the skeletons of the hippopotami into the water; several huge heads appeared and then vanished from the surface, and the ribs of the carcase that projected, trembled and jerked as the jaws of the crocodiles were at work beneath. I shot one of very large size through the head, but it sank to the bottom; I expected to find it on the following morning floating upon the surface when the gas should have distended the body.

I also shot a large single bull hippopotamus late in the evening, which was alone at the extremity of the pool; he sank at the forehead shot, and, as he never rose again, I concluded that he was dead, and that I should find him on the morrow with the crocodile. Tired with the heat, I trudged homeward over the hot

and fatiguing sand of the river's bed.

The cool night arrived, and at about half-past eight I was lying half asleep upon my bed by the margin of the river, when I fancied that I heard a rumbling like distant thunder: I had not heard such a sound for months, but a low uninterrupted roll appeared to increase in volume, although far distant. Hardly had I raised my head to listen more attentively when a confusion of voices arose from the Arabs' camp, with a sound of many feet, and in a few minutes they rushed into my camp, shouting to my men in the darkness, "El Bahr! El Bahr!" (the river! the river!)

We were up in an instant, and my interpreter, Mahomet, in a state of intense confusion, explained that the river was coming down, and that the supposed distant thunder was the roar of approaching water.

Many of the people were asleep on the clean sand on the river's bed; these were quickly awakened by the Arabs, who rushed down the steep bank to save the skulls of my two hippopotami that were exposed to dry. Hardly had they descended, when the sound of the river in the darkness beneath told us that the water had arrived, and the men, dripping with wet, had just sufficient time to drag their heavy burdens up the bank.

All was darkness and confusion; everybody was talking and no one listening; but the great event had occurred the river had arrived "like a thief in the night." On the morning of the 24th June, I stood on the banks of the noble Atbara river, at the break of day. The wonder of the desert!—yesterday there was

a barren sheet of glaring sand, with a fringe of withered bush and trees upon its borders, that cut the yellow expanse of desert. For days we had journeyed along the exhausted bed: all Nature, even in Nature's poverty, was most poor: no bush could boast a leaf: no tree could throw a shade: crisp gums crackled upon the stems of the mimosas, the sap dried upon the burst bark, sprung with the withering heat of the simoom. In one night there was a mysterious change—wonders of the mighty Nile!—an army of water was hastening to the wasted river: there was no drop of rain, no thunder-cloud on the horizon to give hope, all had been dry and sultry; dust and desolation yesterday, to-day a magnificent stream, some 500 yards in width and from fifteen to twenty feet in depth, flowed through the dreary desert! Bamboos and reeds, with trash of all kinds, were hurried along the muddy waters. Where were all the crowded inhabitants of the pool? The prison doors were broken, the prisoners were released, and rejoiced in the mighty stream of the Atbara.

The 24th June, 1861, was a memorable day. Although this was actually the beginning of my work, I felt that by the experience of this night I had obtained a clue to one portion of the Nile mystery, and that, as "coming events cast their shadows before them," this sudden creation of a river was but the shadow of the great cause.

The rains were pouring in Abyssinia! these were sources of the Nile!

One of my Turks, Hadji Achmet, was ill; therefore, although I

longed to travel, it was necessary to wait. I extract verbatim from my journal, 26th June:—"The river has still risen; the weather is cooler, and the withered trees and bushes are giving signs of bursting into leaf. This season may be termed the spring of this country. The frightful simoom of April, May, and June, burns everything as though parched by fire, and not even a withered leaf hangs to a bough, but the trees wear a wintry appearance in the midst of intense heat. The wild geese have paired, the birds are building their nests, and, although not even a drop of dew has fallen, all Nature seems to be aware of an approaching change, as the south wind blowing cool from the wet quarter is the harbinger of rain. Already some of the mimosas begin to afford a shade, under which the gazelles may be surely found at mid-day; the does are now in fawn, and the young will be dropped when this now withered land shall be green with herbage.

"Busy, packing for a start to-morrow; I send Hadji Velli back to Berber in charge of the two hippos' heads to the care of the good old Halleem Effendi. No time for shooting to-day. I took out all the hippos' teeth, of which he possesses 40, 10—10, – 10 —10 six tusks and fourteen molars in each jaw. The bones of the hippopotamus, like those of the elephant, are solid, and without marrow."

CHAPTER III
WILD ASSES OF THE DESERT

THE journey along the margin of the Atbara was similar to the entire route from Berber, a vast desert, with the narrow band of trees that marked the course of the river; the only change was the magical growth of the leaves, which burst hourly from the swollen buds of the mimosas: this could be accounted for by the sudden arrival of the river, as the water percolated rapidly through the sand and nourished the famishing roots.

The tracks of wild asses had been frequent, but hitherto I had not seen the animals, as their drinking-hour was at night, after which they travelled far into the desert: however, on the morning of the 29th June, shortly after the start at about 6 A.M., we perceived three of these beautiful creatures on our left—an ass, a female, and a foal. They were about half a mile distant when first observed, and upon our approach to within half that distance they halted and faced about; they were evidently on their return to the desert from the river. Those who have seen donkeys in their civilized state have no conception of the beauty of the wild and original animal. Far from the passive and subdued appearance of the English ass, the animal in its native desert is the perfection of activity and courage; there is a high-bred tone in the deportment, a high-actioned step when it trots freely over

the rocks and sand, with the speed of a horse when it gallops over the boundless desert. No animal is more difficult of approach; and, although they are frequently captured by the Arabs, those taken are invariably the foals, which are ridden down by fast dromedaries, while the mothers escape. The colour of the wild ass is a reddish cream tinged with the shade most prevalent of the ground that it inhabits; thus it much resembles the sand of the desert. I wished to obtain a specimen, and accordingly I exerted my utmost knowledge of stalking to obtain a shot at the male. After at least an hour and a half I succeeded in obtaining a long shot with a single rifle, which passed through the shoulder, and I secured my first and last donkey. It was with extreme regret that I saw my beautiful prize in the last gasp, and I resolved never to fire another shot at one of its race. This fine specimen was in excellent condition, although the miserable pasturage of the desert is confined to the wiry herbage already mentioned; of this the stomach was full, chewed into morsels like chopped reeds. The height of this male ass was about 13.3 or 14 hands; the shoulder was far more sloping than that of the domestic ass, the hoofs were remarkable for their size; they were wide, firm, and as broad as those of a horse of 15 hands. I skinned this animal carefully, and the Arabs divided the flesh among them, while Hadji Achmet selected a choice piece for our own dinner. At the close of our march that evening, the morsel of wild ass was cooked in the form of "rissoles:" the flavour resembled beef but it was extremely tough.

On the following day, 30th June, we reached Gozerajup, a large permanent village on the south bank of the river. By dead reckoning we had marched 246 miles from Berber. This spot was therefore about 220 miles from the junction of the Atbara with the Nile. Here we remained for a few days to rest the donkeys and to engage fresh camels. An extract from my journal will give a general idea of this miserable country:—

"July 3.—I went out early to get something for breakfast, and shot a hare and seven pigeons. On my return to camp, an Arab immediately skinned the hare, and pulling out the liver, lungs, and kidneys, he ate them raw and bloody. The Arabs invariably eat the lungs, liver, kidneys, and the thorax of sheep, gazelles, &c. while they are engaged in skinning the beasts, after which they crack the leg bones between stones, and suck out the raw marrow."

A Bishareen Arab wears his hair in hundreds of minute plaits which hang down to his shoulders, surmounted by a circular bushy topknot upon the crown, about the size of a large breakfast-cup, from the base of which the plaits descend. When in full dress, the plaits are carefully combed out with an ivory skewer about eighteen inches in length; after this operation, the head appears like a huge black mop surmounted by a fellow mop of a small size. Through this mass of hair he carries his skewer, which is generally ornamented, and which answers the double purpose of comb and general scratcher.

The men have remarkably fine features, but the women are

not generally pretty. The Bishareen is the largest Arab tribe of Nubia. Like all the Arabs of Upper Egypt, they pay taxes to the Viceroy; these are gathered by parties of soldiers, who take the opportunity of visiting them during the drought, at which time they can be certainly found near the river; but at any other season it would be as easy to collect tribute from the gazelles of the desert as from the wandering Bishareens. The appearance of Turkish soldiers is anything but agreeable to the Arabs; therefore my escort of Turks was generally received with the "cold shoulder" upon our arrival at an Arab camp, and no supplies were forthcoming in the shape of milk, &c. until the long coorbatch (hippopotamus whip) of Hadji Achmet had cracked several times across the shoulders of the village headman. At first this appeared to me extremely brutal, but I was given to understand that I was utterly ignorant of the Arab character, and that he knew best. I found by experience that Hadji Achmet was correct; even where milk was abundant, the Arabs invariably declared that they had not a drop, that the goats were dry, or had strayed away; and some paltry excuses were offered until the temper of the Turk became exhausted, and the coorbatch assisted in the argument. A magician's rod could not have produced a greater miracle than the hippopotamus whip. The goats were no longer dry, and in a few minutes large gourds of milk were brought, and liberally paid for, while I was ridiculed by the Turk, Hadji Achmet, for so foolishly throwing away money to the "Arab dogs."

Our route was to change. We had hitherto followed the course of the Atbara, but we were now to leave that river on our right, while we should travel S.E. about ninety miles to Cassala, the capital of the Taka country, on the confines of Abyssinia, the great depot upon that frontier for Egyptian troops, military stores, &c.

Having procured fresh camels, we started on 5th July. This portion of the desert was rich in agates and numerous specimens of bloodstone. Exactly opposite the village of Gozerajup are curious natural landmarks,—four pyramidical hills of granite that can be seen for many miles' distance in this perfectly level country. One of these hills is about 500 feet high, and is composed entirely of flaked blocks of grey granite piled one upon the other; some of these stand perpendicularly in single masses from 30 to 50 feet high, and from a distance might be taken for giants climbing the hill-side. The pinnacle has a peculiar conical cap, which appears to have been placed there by design, but upon closer inspection it is found to be natural, as no stone of such immense size could have been placed in such a position.

For the first two hours' march from this landmark, the country was covered with scrubby bush abounding in gazelles and guinea-fowl. Here, for the first time, I saw the secretary bird, known to the Arabs as the "Devil's horse." A pair of these magnificent birds were actively employed in their useful avocation of hunting reptiles, which they chased with wonderful speed. Great numbers

of wild asses passed us during the march towards evening; they were on their way from the desert to the Atbara river, some miles distant upon the west. Veritable thunder we now heard for the first time in Africa, and a cloud rose with great rapidity from the horizon. A cloud was a wonder that we had not enjoyed for months, but as this increased both in size and density, accompanied by a gust of cool wind, we were led to expect a still greater wonder—RAIN! Hardly had we halted for the night, when down it came in torrents, accompanied by a heavy thunderstorm. On the following morning, we experienced the disadvantage of rain; the ground was so slippery that the camels could not march, and we were obliged to defer our start until the sun had dried the surface.

We had now arrived at the most interesting point to an explorer. From Cairo to within a few miles south of Gozerajup stretched the unbroken desert through which we had toiled from Korosko, and which had so firmly impressed its dreariness upon the mind that nothing but desert had been expected: we had learned to be content in a world of hot sand, rocks, and pebbles; but we had arrived upon the limit; the curious landmark of Gozerajup was an everlasting beacon that marked the frontier of the Nubian desert; it was a giant warder, that seemed to guard the living south from the dreadful skeleton of nature on the north; the desert had ceased!

It was a curious and happy coincidence that onr arrival upon the limits of the desert should have been celebrated by the first

shower of rain: we no longer travelled upon sand and stones, but we stood upon a fertile loam, rendered soapy and adhesive by the recent shower. The country was utterly barren at that season, as the extreme heat of the sun and simoom destroys all vegetation so thoroughly that it becomes as crisp as glass; the dried grass breaks in the wind, and is carried away in dust, leaving the earth so utterly naked and bare that it is rendered a complete desert.

In the rainy season, the whole of this country, from the south to Gozerajup, is covered with excellent pasturage, and, far from resembling a desert, it becomes a mass of bright green herbage. The Arabs and their flocks are driven from the south by the flies and by the heavy rains, and Gozerajup offers a paradise to both men and beasts; thousands of camels with their young, hundreds of thousands of goats, sheep, and cattle, are accompanied by the Arabs and their families, who encamp on the happy pastures during the season of plenty.

We had now passed the hunts occupied by the Bishareens, and we had entered upon the country of the Hadendowa Arabs. These are an exceedingly bad tribe, and, together with their neighbours, the Hallonga Arabs, they fought determinedly against the Egyptians, until finally conquered during the reign of the famous Mehemet Ala Pasha, when the provinces of Nubia submitted unconditionally, and became a portion of Upper Egypt.

Upon arrival at Soojalup we came upon the principal encampment of the Hadendowa during the dry season. Within

a few miles of this spot the scene had changed: instead of the bare earth denuded of vegetation, the country was covered with jungle, already nearly green, while the vast plains of grass, enlivened by beautiful herds of antelopes, proved not only the fertility of the soil, but the presence of moisture. Although there was no stream, nor any appearance of a river's bed, Soojalup was well supplied with water throughout the hottest season by numerous wells. This spot is about forty miles distant from Gozerajup, and is the first watering-place upon the route to Cassala. As we approached the wells, we passed several large villages surrounded by fenced gardens of cotton, and tobacco, both of which throve exceedingly. Every village possessed a series of wells, with a simple contrivance for watering their cattle: —Adjoining the mouth of each well was a basin formed of clay, raised sufficiently high above the level of the ground to prevent the animals from treading it while drinking. With a rope and a leathern bag distended by pieces of stick, the water was raised from the wells and emptied into the clay basins; the latter were circular, about nine feet in diameter, and two feet deep. I measured the depth of some of the wells, and found a uniformity of forty feet. We halted at Soojalup for the night: here for the first time I saw the beautiful antelope known by the Arabs as the Ariel (Gazelle Dama). This is a species of gazelle, being similar in form and in shape of the horns, but as large as a fallow deer: the colour also nearly resembles that of the gazelle, with the exception of the rump, which is milk-white.

These animals had no water nearer than the Atbara river, unless they could obtain a stealthy supply from the cattle basins of the Arabs during the night; they were so wild, from being constantly disturbed and hunted by the Arab dogs, that I found it impossible to stalk them upon the evening of our arrival. The jungles literally swarmed with guinea-fowl—I shot nine in a few minutes, and returned to camp with dinner for my whole party. The only species of guinea-fowl that I have seen in Africa is that with the blue comb and wattles. These birds are a blessing to the traveller, as not only are they generally to be met with from the desert frontier throughout the fertile portions of the south, but they are extremely good eating, and far superior to the domestic guinea-fowl of Europe. In this spot, Soojalup, I could have killed any number, had I wished to expend my shot: but this most necessary ammunition required much nursing during a long exploration. I had a good supply, four hundredweight of the most useful sizes, No. 6 for general shooting, and B B. for geese, &c.; also a bag of No. 10, for firing into dense flocks of small birds. On the following morning we left Soojalup; for several miles on our route were Arab camps and wells, with immense herds of goats, sheep, and cattle. Antelopes were very numerous, and it was exceedingly interesting to observe the new varieties as we increased our distance from the north. I shot two from my camel (G. Dorcas); they were about the size of a fine roebuck;—the horns were like those of the gazelle, but the animals were larger and darker in colour, with a distinguishing

mark in a jet black stripe longitudinally dividing the white of the belly from the reddish colour of the flank. These antelopes were exceedingly wild, and without the aid of a camel it would have been impossible to approach them. I had exchanged my donkey for Hadji Achmet's dromedary; thus mounted, I could generally succeed in stalking to within ninety or a hundred yards, by allowing the animal to feed upon the various bushes, as though I had mounted it for the purpose of leading it to graze. This deceived the antelopes, and by carefully ascertaining the correct wind, I obtained several shots, some of which failed, owing to the unsteadiness of my steed, which had a strong objection to the rifle.

The entire country from Gozerajup to Cassala is a dead flat, upon which there is not one tree sufficiently large to shade a full-sized tent: there is no real timber in the country, but the vast level extent of soil is a series of open plains and low bush of thorny mimosa: there is no drainage upon this perfect level; thus, during the rainy season, the soakage actually melts the soil, and forms deep holes throughout the country, which then becomes an impracticable slough, bearing grass and jungle. Upon this fertile tract of land, cotton might be cultivated to a large extent, and sent to Berber, via Atbara, from Gozerajup, during the season of flood. At the present time, the growth is restricted to the supply required by the Arabs for the manufacture of their cloths. These are woven by themselves, the weaver sitting in a hole excavated in the ground before his rude loom, shaded by a rough thatch about

ten feet square, supported upon poles. There is a uniformity in dress throughout all the Nubian tribes of Arabs, the simple toga of the Romans this is worn in many ways, as occasion may suggest, very similar to the Scotch plaid. The quality of cotton produced is the same as that of Lower Egypt, and the cloths manufactured by the Arabs, although coarse, are remarkably soft. The toga or tope is generally ornamented with a few red stripes at either extremity, and is terminated by a fringe.

As we approached within about twenty-five miles o Cassala, I remarked that the country on our left was in many places flooded; the Arabs, who had hitherto been encamped in this neighbourhood during the dry season, were migrating to other localities in the neighbourhood of Soojalup and Gozerajup, with their vast herds of camels and goats. As rain had not fallen in sufficient quantity to account for the flood, I was informed that it was due to the river Gash, or Mareb, which, flowing from Abyssinia, passed beneath the walls of Cassala, and then divided into innumerable ramifications; it was eventually lost, and disappeared in the porous soil, after having flooded a large extent of country. This cause accounted for the never-failing wells of Soojalup—doubtless a substratum of clay prevented the total escape of the water, which remained at a depth of forty feet from the surface. The large tract of country thus annually flooded by the river Gash is rendered extremely fruitful, and is the resort of both the Hadendowa and the Hallonga Arabs during the dry season, who cultivate large quantities of dhurra, and

other grain. Unfortunately, in these climates, fertility of soil is generally combined with unhealthiness, and the commencement of the rainy season is the signal for fevers and other maladies. No sooner had we arrived in the flooded country than my wife was seized with a sudden and severe attack, which necessitated a halt upon the march, as she could no longer sit upon her camel. In the evening, several hundreds of Arabs arrived, and encamped around our fire. It was shortly after sunset, and it was interesting to watch the extreme rapidity with which these swarthy sons of the desert pitched their camp—a hundred fires were quickly blazing; the women prepared the food, children sat in clusters round the blaze, as all were wet from paddling through the puddled ground, from which they were retreating.

No sooner was the bustle of arrangement completed, than a grey old man stepped forward, and, responding to his call, every man of the hundreds present formed in line, three or four deep. At once there was total silence, disturbed only by the crackling of the fires, or by the cry of a child; and with faces turned to the east, in attitudes of profound devotion, the wild but fervent followers of Mahomet repeated their evening prayer.

The flickering red light of the fires illumined the bronze faces of the congregation, and as I stood before the front line of devotees, I took off my cap in respect for their faith, and at the close of their prayer I made my salaam to their venerable Faky (priest); he returned the salutation with the cold dignity of an Arab. In this part the coorbatch of the Turk was unnecessary,

and we shortly obtained supplies of milk. I ordered the dragoman Mahomet to inform the Faky that I was a doctor, and that I had the best medicines at the service of the sick, with advice gratis. In a short time I had many applicants, to whom I served out a quantity of Holloway's pills. These are most useful to an explorer, as, possessing unmistakeable purgative properties, they create an undeniable effect upon the patient, which satisfies him of their value. They are also extremely convenient, as they may be carried by the pound in a tin box, and served out in infinitesimal doses from one to ten at a time, according to the age of the patients. I had a large medicine chest, with all necessary drugs, but I was sorely troubled by the Arab women, many of whom were barren, who insisted upon my supplying them with some medicine that would remove this stigma and render them fruitful. It was in vain to deny them; I therefore gave them usually a small dose of ipecacuanha, with the comforting word to an Arab, "Inshallah," "if it please God." At the same time I explained that the medicine was of little value.

On the following morning, during the march, my wife had a renewal of fever. We had already passed a large village named Abre, and the country was a forest of small trees, which, being in leaf, threw a delicious shade. Under a tree, upon a comfortable bed of dry sand, we wer obliged to lay her for several hours, until the paroxysm passed, and she could remount her dromedary. This she did with extreme difficulty, and we hurried toward Cassala, from which town we were only a few miles distant.

For the last fifty or sixty miles we had seen the Cassala mountain—at first a blue speck above the horizon. It now rose in all the beauty of a smooth and bare block of granite, about 3,500 feet above the level of the country with the town of Cassala at the base, and the roaring torrent Gash flowing at our feet. When we reached the end of the day's march, it was between 5 and 6 P.M. The walled town was almost washed by the river, which was at least 500 yards wide. However, our guides assured us that it was fordable, although dangerous on account of the strength of the current. Camels are most stupid and nervous animals in water; that ridden by my wife was fortunately better than the generality. I sent two Arabs with poles, ahead of my camel, and carefully led the way. After considerable difficulty, we forded the river safely; the water was nowhere above four feet deep, and, in most places, it did not exceed three; but the great rapidity of the stream would have rendered it impossible for the me to cross without the assistance of poles. One of our camels lost its footing, and was carried helplessly down the river for some hundred yards, until it stranded upon a bank.

The sun had sunk when we entered Cassala. It is a walled town, surrounded by a ditch and flanking towers, and containing about 8,000 inhabitants, exclusive of troops. The houses and walls were of unburnt brick, smeared with clay and cow-dung. As we rode through the dusty streets, I sent off Mahomet with my firman to the Mudir; and, not finding a suitable place inside the town, I returned outside the walls, where I ordered the

tents to be pitched in a convenient spot among some wild fig-trees. Hardly were the tents pitched than Mahomet returned, accompanied by an officer and ten soldiers as a guard, with a polite message from the Mudir or governor, who had, as usual, kissed the potent firman, and raised it to his forehead, with the declaration that he was "my servant, and that all that I required should be immediately attended to." Shortly after, we were called upon by several Greeks, one of whom was the army doctor, Signor Georgis, who, with great kindness, offered to supply all our wants. My wife was dreadfully weak and exhausted, therefore an undisturbed night's rest was all that was required, with the independence of our own tent.

Cassala is rich in hyaenas, and the night was passed in the discordant howling of these disgusting but useful animals: they are the scavengers of the country, devouring every species of filth, and clearing all carrion from the earth. Without the hyaenas and vultures, the neighbourhood of a Nubian village would be unbearable; it is the idle custom of the people to leave unburied all animals that die. Thus, among the numerous flocks and herds, the casualties would create a pestilence were it not for the birds and beasts of prey.

On the following morning the fever had yielded to quinine, and we were enabled to receive a round of visits—the governor and suite, Elias Bey, the doctor and a friend, and, lastly, Malem Georgis, an elderly Greek merchant, who, with great hospitality, insisted upon our quitting the sultry tent and sharing his own roof.

We therefore became his guests in a most comfortable house for some days. Our Turk, Hadji Achmet, returned on his way to Berber; we discharged our camels, and prepared – to start afresh from this point for the Nile tributaries of Abyssinia.

CHAPTER IV
ROUTE FROM CASSALA TO SOUAKIM

BY dead reckoning, Cassala is ninety-three miles S.S.E. of Gozerajup, or about 340 miles from Berber. We had ridden about 710 miles from Korosko, 630 miles of which had been through scorching deserts during the hottest season. We were, therefore, thankful to exchange the intense heat of the tent for a solid roof, and to rest for a short time in the picturesque country of Taka.

The direct route to Cassala, the capital of Taka, should be from Suez to Souakim, on the Red Sea, and from thence in sixteen days, by camel. Thus, were there a line from Suez to Souakim by steamers, similar to that already established to Jedda, Cassala would be only twenty-two days' journey from Cairo. At present, the arrival of steamers at Souakim is entirely uncertain; therefore the trade of the country is paralysed by the apathy of the Egyptian Government. The Abdul Azziz Company run their steamers regularly from Suez to Jedda; and, although they advertise Souakim as a port of call, there is no dependence to be placed upon the announcement; therefore, all merchants are afraid not only of delay, but of high warehouse charges at Souakim. The latter port is only four days' steaming from Suez, and, being the most central depot for all merchandise both to and

from Upper Egypt, it would become a point of great importance were regular means of transport established.

Cotton of excellent quality may be grown to an unlimited amount in the provinces of Upper Egypt, and could be delivered at Souakim at a trifling cost of transport. A large quantity of gum arabic is collected throughout this country, which sells in Cassala at 20 piastres (4s. 2d.) the cantar of 100 lbs. There are three varieties, produced from various mimosas; the finest quality is gathered in the province of Kordofan, but I subsequently met with large quantities of this species in the Base country. Senna grows wild in the deserts, but the low price hardly pays for the cost of collection. There are several varieties; that with extremely narrow and sharp-pointed leaves is preferred. It grows in sandy situations where few plants would exist. The bush seldom exceeds three feet in height, and is generally below that standard; but it is exceedingly thick, and rich in a pale green foliage, which is a strong temptation to the hungry camel. Curiously, this purgative plant is the animal's bonne bouche, and is considered most nourishing as fodder.

The exports of the Soudan are limited to gum arabic, ivory, hides, senna, and bees'-wax; the latter is the produce of Abyssinia. These articles are generally collected by travelling native traders, who sell to the larger merchants resident in Cassala and Khartoum, the two principal towns of the Soudan. The bazaar in Cassala was poor, as the principal articles were those of low price, adapted to the wants of the Arabs, who flock

to the capital as a small London, to make their purchases of cloths, perfumery for the women, copper cooking pots, &c.

The fortifications of the town, although useless against cannon, are considered by the Arabs as impregnable. The walls are of solid mud and sun-baked bricks, carefully loopholed for musketry, while a deep fosse, by which it is surrounded, is a safeguard against a sudden surprise.

These engineering precautions were rendered necessary by the ferocity of the Arabs, who fought the Egyptians with great determination for some years before they were finally subdued. Although the weapons of all the Arab tribes are the simple sword and lance, they defended their country against the regular troops of Egypt until they were completely defeated by a scarcity of water, against which there could be no resistance. The Egyptians turned the course of the river Gash, and entirely shut off the supply from one portion of the country, while they inundated another. This was effected by an immense dam, formed of the stems of the dome palms, as a double row of piles, while the interior was rendered water-tight by a lining of matting filled up with sand.

Cassala was built about twenty years before I visited the country, after Taka had been conquered and annexed to Egypt. The general annexation of the Soudan and the submission of the numerous Arab tribes to the Viceroy have been the first steps necessary to the improvement of the country. Although the Egyptians are hard masters, and do not trouble themselves

about the future well-being of the conquered races, it must be remembered that, prior to the annexation, all the tribes were at war among themselves. There was neither government nor law; thus the whole country was closed to Europeans. At present, there is no more danger in travelling in Upper Egypt than in crossing Hyde Park after dark, provided the traveller be just and courteous. At the time of my visit to Cassala in 1861, the Arab tribes were separately governed by their own chiefs or sheiks, who were responsible to the Egyptian authorities for the taxes due from their people: since that period, the entire tribes of all denominations have been placed under the authority of that grand old Arab patriarch Achmet Abou Sinn, to be hereafter mentioned. The Sheik Moosa, of the Hadendowa tribe, was in prison during our stay in that country, for some breach of discipline in his dealings with the Egyptian Government. The iron hand of despotism has produced a marvellous change among the Arabs, who are rendered utterly powerless by the system of government adopted by the Egyptians; unfortunately, this harsh system has the effect of paralysing all industry.

The principal object of Turks and Egyptians in annexation, is to increase their power of taxation by gaining an additional number of subjects. Thus, although many advantages have accrued to the Arab provinces of Nubia through Egyptian rule, there exists an amount of mistrust between the governed and the governing. Not only are the camels, cattle, and sheep subjected to a tax, but every attempt at cultivation is thwarted by the

authorities, who impose a fine or tax upon the superficia1 area of the cultivated land. Thus, no one will cultivate more than is absolutely necessary, as he dreads the difficulties that the broad acres of waving crops would entail upon his family. The bona fide tax is a bagatelle to the amounts squeezed from him by the extortionate soldiery, who are the agents employed by the sheik; these must have their share of the plunder, in excess of the amount to be delivered to their employer; he, also, must have his plunder before he parts with the bags of dollars to the governor of the province. Thus the unfortunate cultivator is ground down; should he refuse to pay the necessary "baksheesh" or present to the tax-collectors, some false charge is trumped up against him, and he is thrown into prison. As a green field is an attraction to a flight of locusts in their desolating voyage, so is a luxuriant farm in the Soudan a point for the tax-collectors of Upper Egypt. I have frequently ridden several days' journey through a succession of empty villages, deserted by the inhabitants upon the report of the soldiers' approach; the women and children, goats and cattle, camels and asses, have all been removed into the wilderness for refuge, while their crops of corn have been left standing for the plunderers, who would be too idle to reap and thrash the grain.

Notwithstanding the misrule that fetters the steps of improvement, Nature has bestowed such great capabilities of production in the fertile soil of this country, that the yield of a small surface is more than sufficient for the requirements of the population, and actual poverty is unknown. The average price

of dhurra is fifteen piastres per "rachel," or about 3s. 2d. for 500 lbs. upon the spot where it is grown. The dhurra (Sorghum andropogon) is the grain most commonly used throughout the Soudan; there are great varieties of this plant, of which the most common are the white and the red. The land is not only favoured by Nature by its fertility, but the intense heat of the summer is the labourer's great assistant. As before described, all vegetation entirely disappears in the glaring Sun, or becomes so dry that it is swept off by fire; thus the soil is perfectly clean and fit for immediate cultivation upon the arrival of the rains. The tool generally used is similar to the Dutch hoe. With this simple implement the surface is scratched to the depth of about two inches, and the seeds of the dhurra are dibbled in about three feet apart, in rows from four to five feet in width. Two seeds are dropped into each hole. A few days after the first shower they rise above the ground, and when about six inches high, the whole population turn out of their villages at break of day to weed the dhurra fields. Sown in July, it is harvested in February and March. Eight months are thus required for the cultivation of this cereal in the intense heat of Nubia. For the first three months the growth is extremely rapid, and the stem attains a height of six or seven feet. When at perfection on the rich soil of the Taka country, the plant averages a height of ten feet, the circumference of the stem being about four inches. The crown is a feather very similar to that of the sugar cane; the blossom falls, and the feather becomes a head of dhurra, weighing about two

pounds. Each grain is about the size of hemp-seed. I took the trouble of counting the corns contained in an average-sized head, the result being 4,848. The process of harvesting and thrashing are remarkably simple, as the heads are simply detached from the straw and beaten out in piles. The dried straw is a substitute for sticks in forming the walls of the village huts; these are plastered with clay and cow-dung, which form the Arab's lath and plaster.

The millers' work is exclusively the province of the women. There are no circular hand-mills, as among Oriental nations; but the corn is ground upon a simple flat stone, of either gneiss or granite, about two feet in length by fourteen inches in width. The face of this is roughened by beating with a sharp-pointed piece of harder stone, such as quartz, or hornblende, and the grain is reduced to flour by great labour and repeated grinding or rubbing with a stone rolling-pin. The flour is mixed with water and allowed to ferment; it is then made into thin pancakes upon an earthenware flat portable hearth. This species of leavened bread is known to the Arabs as the kisra. It is not very palatable, but it is extremely well suited to Arab cookery, as it can be rolled up like a pancake and dipped in the general dish of meat and gravy very conveniently, in the absence of spoons and forks. No man will condescend to grind the corn, and even the Arab women have such an objection to this labour, that one of the conditions of matrimony enforced upon the husband, if possible, provides the wife with a slave woman to prepare the flour.

Hitherto we had a large stock of biscuits, but as our dragoman

Mahomet had, in a curious fit of amiability, dispensed them among the camel-drivers, we were now reduced to the Arab kisras. Although not as palatable as wheaten bread, the flour of dhurra is exceedingly nourishing, containing, according to Professor Johnston's analysis, eleven and a half per cent. of gluten, or one and a half per cent. more than English wheaten flour. Thus men and beasts thrive, especially horses, which acquire an excellent condition.

The neighbourhood of Cassala is well adapted for the presence of a large town and military station, as the fertile soil produces the necessary supplies, while the river Gash affords excellent water. In the rainy season this should be filtered, as it brings down many impurities from the torrents of Abyssinia, but in the heat of summer the river is entirely dry, and clear and wholesome water is procured from wells in the sandy bed. The south and south-east of Cassala is wild and mountainous, affording excellent localities for hill stations during the unhealthy rainy season; but such sanitary arrangements for the preservation of troops are about as much heeded by the Egyptian Government as by our own, and regiments are left in unwholesome climates to take their chance, although the means of safety are at hand.

The Taka country being the extreme frontier of Egypt, constant raids are made by the Egyptians upon their neighbours —the hostile Base, through which country the river Gash or Mareb descends. I was anxious to procure all the information possible concerning the Base, as it would be necessary to traverse

the greater portion in exploring the Settite river, which is the principal tributary of the Atbara, and which is in fact the main and parent stream, although bearing a different name. I heard but one opinion of the Base—it was a wild and independent country, inhabited by a ferocious race, whose hand was against every man, and who in return were the enemies of all by whom they were surrounded—Egyptians, Abyssinians, Arabs, and Mek Nimmur; nevertheless, secure in their mountainous stronghold, they defied all adversaries. The Base is a portion of Abyssinia, but the origin of the tribe that occupies this ineradicable hornet's nest is unknown. Whether they are the remnant of the original Ethiopians, who possessed the country prior to the conquests of the Abyssinians, or whether they are descended from the woolly-haired tribes of the south banks of the Blue Nile, is equally a mystery; all we know is that they are of the same type as the inhabitants of Fazogle, of the upper portion of the Blue River; they are exceedingly black, with woolly hair, resembling in that respect the negro, but without the flat nose or prognathous jaw. No quarter is given on either side, should the Base meet the Arabs, with whom war is to the knife. In spite of the overwhelming superiority of their adversaries, the Base cannot be positively subdued; armed with the lance as their only weapon, but depending upon extreme agility and the natural difficulties of their mountain passes, the attack of the Base is always by stealth; their spies are ever prowling about unseen like the leopard, and their onset is invariably a surprise; success or defeat are alike

followed by a rapid retreat to their mountains.

As there is nothing to be obtained by the plunder of the Base but women and children as slaves, the country is generally avoided, unless visited for the express purpose of a slave razzia. Cultivation being extremely limited, the greater portion of the country is perfectly wild, and is never visited even by the Base themselves unless for the purpose of hunting. Several beautiful rivers descend from the mountain ranges, which ultimately flow into the Atbara; these, unlike the latter river, are never dry: thus, with a constant supply of water, in a country of forest and herbage, the Base abounds in elephants, rhinoceroses, hippopotami, giraffes, buffaloes, lions, leopards, and great numbers of the antelope tribe.

Cassala, thus situated on the confines of the Taka country, is an important military point in the event of war between Egypt and Abyssinia, as the Base would be invaluable as allies to the Egyptians; their country commands the very heart of Abyssinia, and their knowledge of the roads would be an incalculable advantage to an invading force. On the 14th July I had concluded my arrangements for the start; there had been some difficulty in procuring camels, but the all-powerful firman was a never-failing talisman, and, as the Arabs had declined to let their animals for hire, the Governor despatched a number of soldiers and seized the required number, including their owners. I engaged two wild young Arabs of eighteen and twenty years of age, named Bacheet and Wat Gamma: the latter being interpreted

signifies "Son of the Moon." This in no way suggests lunacy, but the young Arab had happened to enter this world on the day of the new moon, which was considered to be a particularly fortunate and brilliant omen at his birth. Whether the climax of his good fortune had arrived at the moment he entered my service I know not, but, if so, there was a cloud over his happiness in his subjection to Mahomet the dragoman, who rejoiced in the opportunity of bullying the two inferiors. Wat Gamma was a quiet, steady, well-conducted lad, who bore oppression mildly; but the younger, Bacheet, was a fiery, wild young Arab, who, although an excellent boy in his peculiar way, was almost incapable of being tamed and domesticated. I at once perceived that Mahomet would have a determined rebel to control, which I confess I did not regret. Wages were not high in this part of the world,—the lads were engaged at one and a half dollar per month and their keep. Mahomet, who was a great man, suffered from the same complaint to which great men are (in those countries) particularly subject: wherever he went, he was attacked with claimants of relationship; he was overwhelmed with professions of friendship from people who claimed to be connexions of some of his family; in fact, if all the ramifications of his race were correctly represented by the claimants of relationship, Mahomet's family tree would have shaded the Nubian desert.

We all have our foibles: the strongest fort has its feeble point, as the chain snaps at its weakest link;—family pride was Mahomet's weak link. This was his tender point; and Mahomet,

the great and the imperious, yielded to the gentle scratching of his ear if a stranger claimed connexion with his ancient lineage. Of course he had no family, with the exception of his wife and two children, whom he had left in Cairo. The lady whom he had honoured by an admission to the domestic circle of the Mahomets was suffering from a broken arm when we started from Egypt, as she had cooked the dinner badly, and the "gaddah," or large wooden bowl, had been thrown at her by the naturally indignant husband, precisely as he had thrown the axe at one man and the basin at another, while in our service: these were little contretemps that could hardly disturb the dignity of so great a man. Mahomet met several relations at Cassala: one borrowed money of him; another stole his pipe; the third, who declared that nothing should separate them now that "by the blessing of God" they had met, determined to accompany him through all the difficulties of our expedition, provided that Mahomet would only permit him to serve for love, without wages. I gave Mahomet some little advice upon this point, reminding him that, although the clothes of the party were only worth a few piastres, the spoons and forks were silver, therefore I should hold him responsible for the honesty of his friend. This reflection upon the family gave great offence, and he assured me that Achmet, our quondam acquaintance, was so near a relation that he was—I assisted him in the genealogical distinction: "Mother's brother's cousin's sister's mother's son? Eh, Mahomet?" "Yes, sar, that's it!" "Very well, Mahomet; mind he don't steal the

spoons, and thrash him if he doesn't do his work!" "Yes, sar," replied Mahomet; "he all same like one brother, he one good man will do his business quietly; if not, master lick him." The new relation not understanding English, was perfectly satisfied with the success of his introduction, and from that moment he became one of the party. One more addition, and our arrangements were completed:– the Governor of Cassala was determined that we should not start without a representative of the Government, in the shape of a soldier guide; he accordingly gave us a black man, a corporal in one of the Nubian regiments, who was so renowned as a sportsman that he went by the name of "El Baggar" (the cow), on account of his having killed several of the oryx antelope, known as "El Baggar et Wahash" (the cow of the desert).

The rains had fairly commenced, as a heavy thunder-shower generally fell at about 2 P.M. On the 15th, the entire day was passed in transporting our baggage across the river Gash to the point from which we had started upon our arrival at Cassala: this we accomplished with much difficulty, with the assistance of about a hundred men supplied by the Governor, from whom we had received much attention and politeness. We camped for the night upon the margin of the river, and marched on the following morning at daybreak due west towards the Atbara.

The country was a great improvement upon that we had hitherto passed; the trees were larger, and vast plains of young grass, interspersed with green bush, stretched to the horizon. The soil was an exceedingly rich loam, most tenacious when wetted:

far as the eye could reach to the north and west of Cassala was the dead level plain, while to the south and east arose a broken chain of mountains.

We had not proceeded many miles, when the numerous tracks of antelopes upon the soil, moistened by the shower of yesterday, proved that we had arrived in a sporting country; shortly after, we saw a herd of about fifty ariels (Gazelle Dama). To stalk these wary antelopes I was obliged to separate from my party, who continued on their direct route. Riding upon my camel, I tried every conceivable dodge without success. I could not approach them nearer than about 300 yards. They did not gallop off at once, but made a rush for a few hundred paces, and then faced about to gaze at the approaching camel. After having exhausted my patience to no purpose, I tried another plan: instead of advancing against the wind as before, I made a great circuit and gave them the wind. No sooner was I in good cover behind a mimosa bush than I dismounted from my camel, and, leading it until within view of the shy herd, I tied it to a tree, keeping behind the animal so as to be well concealed. I succeeded in retreating through the bushes unobserved, leaving the camel as a gazing point to attract their attention. Running at my best speed to the same point from which I had commenced my circuit, and keeping under cover of the scattered bushes, I thus obtained the correct wind, and stalked up from bush to bush behind the herd, who were curiously watching the tied camel, that was quietly gazing on a mimosa. In this way I had succeeded in getting within 150

yards of the beautiful herd, when a sudden fright seized them, and they rushed off in an opposite direction to the camel, so as to pass about 120 yards on my left; as they came by in full speed, I singled out a superb animal, and tried the first barrel of the little Fletcher rifle. I heard the crack of the ball, and almost immediately afterwards the herd passed on, leaving one lagging behind at a slow canter; this was my wounded ariel, who shortly halted, and laid down in an open glade. Having no dog, I took the greatest precaution in stalking, as a wounded antelope is almost certain to escape if once disturbed when it has lain down. There was a small withered stem of a tree not thicker than a man's thigh; this grew within thirty yards of the antelope; my only chance of approach was to take a line direct for this slight object of cover. The wind was favourable, and I crept along the ground. I had succeeded in arriving within a few yards of the tree when up jumped the antelope, and bounded off as though unhurt; but there was no chance for it at this distance, and I rolled it over with a shot through the spine.

Having done the needful with my beautiful prize, and extracted the interior, I returned for my camel that had well assisted in the stalk. Hardly had I led the animal to the body of the ariel, when I heard a rushing sound like a strong wind, and down came a vulture with its wings collapsed, falling from an immense height direct to its prey, in its eagerness to be the first in the race. By the time that I had fastened the ariel across the back of the camel, many vultures were sitting upon the ground

at a few yards' distance, while others were arriving every minute: before I had shot the ariel, not a vulture had been in sight; the instant that I retreated from the spot a flock of ravenous beaks were tearing at the offal.

In the constant doubling necessary during the stalk I had quite lost my way. The level plain to the horizon, covered with scattered mimosas, offered no object as a guide. I was exceedingly thirsty, as the heat was intense, and I had been taking rapid exercise; unfortunately my water-skin was slung upon my wife's camel. However unpleasant the situation, my pocket compass would give me the direction, as we had been steering due west; therefore, as I had turned to my left when I left my party, a course N.W. should bring me across their tracks, if they had continued on their route. The position of the Cassala mountain agreed with this course; therefore, remounting my dromedary, with the ariel slung behind the saddle, I hastened to rejoin our caravan. After about half an hour I heard a shot fired not far in advance, and I shortly joined the party, who had fired a gun to give me the direction. A long and deep pull at the water-skin was the first salutation.

We halted that night near a small pond formed by the recent heavy rain. Fortunately the sky was clear; there was abundance of fuel, and pots were shortly boiling an excellent stew of ariel venison and burnt onions. The latter delicious bulbs are the blessing of Upper Egypt: I have lived for days upon nothing but raw onions and sun-dried rusks. Nothing is so good a substitute

for meat as an onion; but if raw, it should be cut into thin slices, and allowed to soak for half an hour in water, which should be poured off: the onion thus loses its pungency, and becomes mild and agreeable; with the accompaniment of a little oil and vinegar it forms an excellent salad.

The following day's march led us through the same dead level of grassy plains and mimosas, enlivened with numerous herds of ariels and large black-striped gazelles (Dorcas), one of which I succeeded in shooting for my people. After nine hours' journey we arrived at the, valley of the Atbara, in all sixteen hours' actual marching from Cassala.

There was an extraordinary change in the appearance of the river between Gozerajup and this spot. There was no longer the vast sandy desert with the river flowing through its sterile course on a level with the surface of the country, but after traversing an apparently perfect flat of forty-five miles of rich alluvial soil, we had suddenly arrived upon the edge of a deep valley, between five and six miles wide, at the bottom of which, about 200 feet below the general level of the country, flowed the river Atbara. On the opposite side of the valley, the same vast table lands continued to the western horizon.

We commenced the descent towards the river; the valley was a succession of gullies and ravines, of landslips and watercourses; the entire hollow, of miles in width, had evidently been the work of the river. How many ages had the rains and the stream been at work to scoop out from the flat table land this deep and broad

valley? Here was the giant labourer that had shovelled the rich loam upon the delta of Lower Egypt! Upon these vast flats of fertile soil there can be no drainage except through soakage. The deep valley is therefore the receptacle not only for the water that oozes from its sides, but subterranean channels, bursting as land-springs from all parts of the walls of the valley, wash down the more soluble portions of earth, and continually waste away the soil. Landslips occur daily during the rainy season; streams of rich mud pour down the valley's slopes, and as the river flows beneath in a swollen torrent, the friable banks topple down into the stream and dissolve. The Atbara becomes the thickness of pea-soup, as its muddy waters steadily perform the duty they have fulfilled from age to age. Thus was the great river at work upon our arrival on its bank at the bottom of the valley. The Arab name, "Bahr el Aswat" (black river) was well bestowed; it was the black mother of Egypt, still carrying to her offspring the nourishment that had first formed the Delta.

At this point of interest, the journey had commenced; the deserts were passed, all was fertility and life: wherever the sources of the Nile might be, the Atbara was the parent of Egypt! This was my first impression, to be proved hereafter.

CHAPTER V
THE STORM

A VIOLENT thunderstorm, with a deluge of rain, broke upon our camp upon the banks of the Atbara, fortunately just after the tents were pitched. We thus had an example of the extraordinary effects of the heavy rain in tearing away the soil of the valley. Trifling watercourses were swollen to torrents; banks of earth became loosened and fell in, and the rush of mud and water upon all sides swept forward into the river with a rapidity which threatened the destruction of the country, could such a tempest endure for a few days. In a couple of hours all was over. The river was narrower than in its passage through the desert, but was proportionately deeper. The name of the village on the opposite bank was Goorashee, with which a means of communication had been established by a ferry-boat belonging to our friend and late host, Malem Georgis, the Greek merchant of Cassala. He had much trouble in obtaining permission from the authorities to introduce this novelty, which was looked upon as an innovation, as such a convenience had never before existed. The enterprising proprietor had likewise established a cotton farm at Goorashee, which appeared to succeed admirably, and was an undeniable example of what could be produced in this fertile country were the spirit of improvement awakened. Notwithstanding the

advantage of the ferry-boat, many of the Arabs preferred to swim their camels across the river to paying a trifle to the ferryman. A camel either cannot or will not swim unless it is supported by inflated skins: thus the passage of the broad river Atbara (at this spot about 300 yards wide) is an affair of great difficulty. Two water-skins are inflated, and attached to the camel by a band passed like a girth beneath the belly. Thus arranged, a man sits upon its back, while one or two swim by the side as guides. The current of the Atbara runs at a rapid rate; thus the camel is generally carried at least half a mile down the river before it can gain the opposite bank. A few days before our arrival, a man had been snatched from the back of his camel while crossing, and was carried off by a crocodile. Another man had been taken during the last week while swimming the river upon a log. It was supposed that these accidents were due to the same crocodile, who was accustomed to bask upon a mud bank at the foot of the cotton plantation. On the day following our arrival at the Atbara, we found that our camel-drivers had absconded during the night with their camels; these were the men who had been forced to serve by the Governor of Cassala. There was no possibility of proceeding for some days, therefore I sent El Baggar across the river to endeavour to engage camels, while I devoted myself to a search for the crocodile. I shortly discovered that it was unfair in the extreme to charge one particular animal with the death of the two Arabs, as several large crocodiles were lying upon the mud in various places. A smaller one was lying asleep high and dry

upon the bank; the wind was blowing strong, so that, by carefully approaching, I secured a good shot within thirty yards, and killed it on the spot by a bullet through the head, placed about an inch above the eyes.

After some time, the large crocodiles, who had taken to the water at the report of the gun, again appeared, and crawled slowly out of the muddy river to their basking-places upon the bank. A crocodile usually sleeps with its mouth wide open; I therefore waited until the immense jaws of the nearest were well expanded, showing a grand row of glittering teeth, when I crept carefully towards it through the garden of thickly-planted cotton. Bacheet and Wat Gamma followed in great eagerness. In a short time I arrived within about forty yards of the beast, as it lay upon a flat mud bank formed by one of the numerous torrents that had carried down the soil during the storm of yesterday. The cover ceased, and it was impossible to approach nearer without alarming the crocodile; it was a fine specimen, apparently nineteen or twenty feet in length, and I took a steady shot with the little Fletcher rifle at the temple, exactly in front of the point of union of the head with the spine. The jaws clashed together, and a convulsive start followed by a twitching of the tail led me to suppose that sudden death had succeeded the shot; but, knowing the peculiar tenacity of life possessed by the crocodile, I fired another shot at the shoulder, as the huge body lay so close to the river's edge that the slightest struggle would cause it to disappear. To my surprise, this shot, far

from producing a quietus, gave rise to a series of extraordinary convulsive struggles. One moment it rolled upon its back, lashed out right and left with its tail, and ended by toppling over into the river.

This was too much for the excitable Bacheet, who, followed by his friend, Wat Gamma, with more courage than discretion, rushed into the river, and endeavoured to catch the crocodile by the tail. Before I had time to call them back, these two Arab water-dogs were up to their necks in the river, screaming out directions to each other while they were feeling for the body of the monster with their feet. At length I succeeded in calling them to shore, and we almost immediately saw the body of the crocodile appear belly upwards, about fifty yards down the stream; the forepaws were above the water, but, after rolling round several times, it once more disappeared, rapidly carried away by the muddy torrent. This was quite enough for the Arabs, who had been watching the event from the opposite bank of the river, and the report quickly spread that two crocodiles were killed, one of which they declared to be the public enemy that had taken the men at the ferry, but upon what evidence I cannot understand. Although my Arabs looked forward to a dinner of crocodile flesh, I was obliged to search for something of rather milder flavour for ourselves. I waited for about an hour while the first crocodile was being divided, when I took a shot gun and succeeded in killing three geese and a species of antelope no larger than a hare, known by the Arabs as the Dik-dik

(Nanotragus Hemprichianus). This little creature inhabits thick bush. Since my return to England, I have seen a good specimen in the Zoological Gardens of the Regent's Park.

Upon my arrival at the tents, I found the camp redolent of musk from the flesh of the crocodile, and the people were quarrelling for the musk glands, which they had extracted, and which are much prized by the Arab women, who wear them strung like beads upon a necklace.

A crocodile possesses four of such glands; they vary in size according to the age of the reptile, but they are generally about as large as a hazel-nut, when dried. Two glands are situated in the groin, and two in the throat, a little in advance of the fore-legs. I have noticed two species of crocodiles throughout all the rivers of Abyssinia, and in the White Nile. One of these is of a dark brown colour, and much shorter and thicker in proportion than the other, which grows to an immense length, an is generally of a pale greenish yellow. Throughout the Atbara, crocodiles are extremely mischievous and bold; this can be accounted for by the constant presence of Arabs and their flocks, which the crocodiles have ceased to fear, as they exact a heavy tribute in their frequent passages of the river. The Arabs assert that the dark-coloured, thick-bodied species is more to be dreaded than the other.

The common belief that the scales of the crocodile will stop a bullet is very erroneous. If a rifle is loaded with the moderate charge of two and a half drachms it will throw an ounce ball through the scales of the hardest portion of the back; but were

the scales struck obliquely, the bullet might possibly glance from the surface, as in like manner it would ricochet from the surface of water. The crocodile is so difficult to kill outright, that people are apt to imagine that the scales have resisted their bullets. The only shots that will produce instant death are those that strike the brain or the spine through the neck. A shot through the shoulder is fatal; but as the body immediately sinks, and does not reappear upon the surface until the gases have distended the carcase, the game is generally carried away by the stream before it has had time to float. The body of a crocodile requires from twelve to eighteen hours before it will rise to the surface, while that of the hippopotamus will never remain longer than two hours beneath the water, and will generally rise in an hour and a half after death. This difference in time depends upon the depth and temperature; in deep holes of the river of from thirty to fifty feet, the water is much cooler near the bottom, thus the gas is not generated in the body so quickly as in shallow and warmer water. The crocodile is not a grass-feeder, therefore the stomach is comparatively small, and the contents do not generate the amount of gas that so quickly distends the huge stomach of the hippopotamus; thus the body of the former requires a longer period before it will rise to the surface.

In the evening we crossed with our baggage and people to the opposite side of the river, and pitched our tents at the village of Goorashee. A small watercourse had brought down a large quantity of black sand. Thinking it probable that gold might

exist in the same locality, I washed some earth in a copper basin, and quickly discovered a few specks of the precious metal. Gold is found in small quantities in the sand of the Atbara; at Fazogle, on the Blue Nile, there are mines of this metal worked by the Egyptian Govermnent. From my subsequent experience I have no doubt that valuable minerals exist in large quantities throughout the lofty chain of Abyssinian mountains from which these rivers derive their sources.

The camels arrived, and once more we were ready to start. Our factotum, El Baggar, had collected a number of both baggage-camels and riding dromedaries or "hygeens;" the latter he had brought for approval, as we had suffered much from the extreme roughness of our late camels. There is the same difference between a good hygeen or dromedary and a baggage-camel as between the thoroughbred and the cart-horse; and it appears absurd in the eyes of the Arabs that a man of any position should ride a baggage-camel. Apart from all ideas of etiquette, the motion of the latter animal is quite sufficient warning. Of all species of fatigue, the back-breaking monotonous swing of a heavy camel is the worst; and, should the rider lose patience, and administer a sharp cut with the coorbatch that induces the creature to break into a trot, the torture of the rack is a pleasant tickling compared to the sensation of having your spine driven by a sledge-hammer from below, half a foot deeper into the skull. The human frame may be inured to almost anything; thus the Arabs, who have always been accustomed to this kind of

exercise, hardly feel the motion, and the portion of the body most subject to pain in riding a rough camel upon two bare pieces of wood for a saddle, becomes naturally adapted for such rough service, as monkeys become hardened from constantly sitting upon rough substances. The children commence almost as soon as they are born, as they must accompany their mothers in their annual migrations; and no sooner can the young Arab sit astride and hold on, than he is placed behind his father's saddle, to which he clings, while he bumps upon the bare back of the jolting camel. Nature quickly arranges a horny protection to the nerves, by the thickening of the skin; thus, an Arab's opinion of the action of a riding hygeen should never be accepted without a personal trial. What appears delightful to him may be torture to you, as a strong breeze and a rough sea may be charming to a sailor, but worse than death to a landsman.

I was determined not to accept the camels now offered as hygeens until I had seen them tried; I accordingly ordered our black soldier El Baggar to saddle the most easy-actioned animal for my wife, but I wished to see him put it through a variety of paces before she should accept it. The delighted El Baggar, who from long practice was as hard as the heel of a boot, disdained a saddle; the animal knelt, was mounted, and off he started at full trot, performing a circle of about fifty yards' diameter as though in a circus. I never saw such an exhibition! "Warranted quiet to ride, of easy action, and fit for a lady!" This had been the character received with the rampant brute, who now, with

head and tail erect, went tearing round the circle, screaming and roaring like a wild beast, throwing his fore-legs forward, and stepping at least three feet high in his trot. Where was El Baggar? A disjointed-looking black figure was sometimes on the back of this easy-going camel, sometimes a foot high in the air; arms, head, legs, hands appeared like a confused mass of dislocations; the woolly hair of this unearthly individual, that had been carefully trained in long stiff narrow curls, precisely similar to the tobacco known as "negro-head," alternately started upright en masse, as though under the influence of electricity, and then fell as suddenly upon his shoulders: had the dark individual been a "black dose," he or it could not have been more thoroughly shaken. This object, so thoroughly disguised by rapidity of movement, was El Baggar; happy, delighted El Baggar! As he came rapidly round towards us flourishing his coorbatch, I called to him, "Is that a nice hygeen for the Sit (lady), El Baggar? is it VERY easy?" He was almost incapable of a reply. "V-e-r-y e-e-a-a-s-y," replied the trustworthy authority, "j-j-j-just the thin-n-n-g for the S-i-i-i-t-t-t." "All right, that will do," I answered, and the jockey pulled up his steed. "Are the other camels better or worse than that?" I asked. "Much worse," replied El Baggar; "the others are rather rough, but this is an easy-goer, and will suit the lady well."

It was impossible to hire a good hygeen; an Arab prizes his riding animal too much, and invariably refuses to let it to a stranger, but generally imposes upon him by substituting

some lightly-built camel, that he thinks will pass muster. I accordingly chose for my wife a steady-going animal from among the baggage-camels, trusting to be able to obtain a hygeen from the great sheik Abou Sinn, who was encamped upon the road we were about to take along the valley of the Atbara; we arranged to leave Goorashee on the following day.

Upon arriving at the highest point of the valley, we found ourselves on the vast table land that stretches from the Atbara to the Nile. At this season the entire surface had a faint tint of green, as the young shoots of grass had replied to the late showers of rain; so perfect a level was this great tract of fertile country, that within a mile of the valley of the Atbara there was neither furrow nor watercourse, but the escape of the rainfall was by simple soakage. As usual, the land was dotted with mimosas, all of which were now bursting into leaf. The thorns of the different varieties of these trees are an extraordinary freak of Nature, as she appears to have exhausted all her art in producing an apparently useless arrangement of defence. The mimosas that are most common in the Soudan provinces are mere bushes, seldom exceeding six feet in height; these spread out towards the top like mushrooms, but the branches commence within two feet of the ground; they are armed with thorns in the shape of fish-hooks, which they resemble in sharpness and strength. A thick jungle composed of such bushes is perfectly impenetrable to any animals but elephants, rhinoceroses, and buffaloes; and should the clothes of a man become entangled in such thorns, either they

must give way, or he must remain a prisoner. The mimosa that is known among the Arabs as the Kittar is one of the worst species, and is probably similar to that which caught Absalom by the hair; this differs from the well-known "Wait-a-bit" of South Africa, as no milder nickname could be applied than "Dead-stop." Were the clothes of strong material, it would be perfectly impossible to break through a kittar-bush.

A magnificent specimen of a kittar, with a wide-spreading head in the young glory of green leaf, tempted my hungry camel during our march; it was determined to procure a mouthful, and I was equally determined that it should keep to the straight path, and avoid the attraction of the green food. After some strong remonstrance upon my part, the perverse beast shook its ugly head, gave a roar, and started off in full trot straight at the thorny bush. I had not the slightest control over the animal, and in a few seconds it charged the bush with the mad intention of rushing either through or beneath it. To my disgust I perceived that the wide-spreading branches were only just sufficiently high to permit the back of the camel to pass underneath. There was no time for further consideration; we charged the bush; I held my head doubled up between my arms, and the next moment I was on my back, half stunned by the fall. The camel-saddle lay upon the ground; my rifle, that had been slung behind, my coffee-pot, the water-skin burst, and a host of other impedimenta, lay around me in all directions; worst of all, my beautiful gold repeater lay at some distance from me, rendered entirely useless. I was as nearly

naked as I could be; a few rags held together, but my shirt was gone, with the exception of some shreds that adhered to my arms. I was, of course, streaming with blood, and looked much more as though I had been clawed by a leopard than as having simply charged a bush. The camel had fallen down with the shock after I had been swept off by the thorny branches. To this day I have the marks of the scratching.

Unless a riding-camel is perfectly trained, it is the most tiresome animal to ride after the first green leaves appear; every bush tempts it from the path, and it is a perpetual fight between the rider and his beast throughout the journey.

We shortly halted for the night, as I had noticed unmistakeable signs of an approaching storm. We quickly pitched the tents, grubbed up the root and stem of a decayed mimosa, and lighted a fire, by the side of which our people sat in a circle. Hardly had the pile begun to blaze, when a cry from Mahomet's new relative, Achmet, informed us that he had been bitten by a scorpion. Mahomet appeared to think this highly entertaining, until suddenly he screamed out likewise, and springing from the ground, he began to stamp and wring his hands in great agony: he had himself been bitten, and we found that a whole nest of scorpions were in the rotten wood lately thrown upon the fire; in their flight from the heat they stung all whom they met. There was no time to prepare food; the thunder already roared above us, and in a few minutes the sky, lately so clear, was as black as ink. I had already prepared for the storm, and the baggage was

piled within the tent; the ropes of the tents had been left slack to allow for the contraction, and we were ready for the rain. It was fortunate that we were in order; a rain descended, with an accompaniment of thunder and lightning, of a volume unknown to the inhabitants of cooler climates; for several hours there was almost an uninterrupted roar of the most deafening peals, with lightning so vivid that our tent was completely lighted up in the darkness of the night, and its misery displayed. Not only was the rain pouring through the roof so that we were wet through as we crouched upon our angareps (stretchers), but the legs of our bedstead stood in more than six inches of water. Being as wet as I could be, I resolved to enjoy the scene outside the tent; it was curious in the extreme. Flash after flash of sharp forked lightning played upon the surface of a boundless lake; there was not a foot of land visible, but the numerous dark bushes projecting from the surface of the water destroyed the illusion of depth that the scene would otherwise have suggested. The rain ceased, but the entire country was flooded several inches deep; and when the more distant lightning flashed as the storm rolled away, I saw the camels lying like statues built into the lake. On the following morning the whole of this great mass of water had been absorbed by the soil, which had become so adhesive and slippery that it was impossible for the camels to move; we therefore waited for some hours, until the intense heat of the sun had dried the surface sufficiently to allow the animals to proceed.

Upon striking the tent, we found beneath the valance between

the crown and the walls a regiment of scorpions; the flood had doubtless destroyed great numbers within their holes, but these, having been disturbed by the deluge, had found an asylum by crawling up the tent walls: with great difficulty we lighted a fire, and committed them all to the flames. Mahomet made a great fuss about his hand, which was certainly much swollen, but not worse than that of Achmet, who did not complain, although during the night he had been again bitten on the leg by one of these venomous insects, that had crawled from the water upon his clothes. During our journey that morning parallel with the valley of the Atbara, I had an excellent opportunity of watching the effect of the storm. We rode along the abrupt margin of the table land, where it broke suddenly into the deep valley; from the sides of this the water was oozing in all directions, creating little avalanches of earth, which fell as they lost their solidity from too much moisture. This wonderfully rich soil was rolling gradually towards Lower Egypt. From the heights above the river we had a beautiful view of the stream, which at this distance, reflecting the bright sunlight, did not appear like the thick liquid mud that we knew it to be. The valley was of the same general character that we had remarked at Goorashee, but more abrupt —a mass of landslips, deep ravines, shaded by mimosas, while the immediate neighbour hood of the Atbara was clothed with the brightest green foliage. In this part, the valley was about three miles in width, and two hundred feet deep.

The commencement of the rainy season was a warning to all

the Arabs of this country, who were preparing for their annual migration to the sandy and firm desert on the west bank of the river, at Gozerajup; that region, so barren and desolate during the hot season, would shortly be covered with a delicate grass about eighteen inches high. At that favoured spot the rains fell with less violence, and it formed a nucleus for the general gathering of the people with their flocks.

We were travelling south at the very season when the natives were migrating north. I saw plainly that it would be impossible for us to continue our journey during the wet season, as the camels had the greatest difficulty in carrying their loads even now, at the commencement: their feet sank deep into the soil; this formed adhesive clods upon their spongy toes, that almost disabled them. The farther we travelled south, the more violent would the rains become, and a long tropical experience warned me that the rainy season was the signal for fevers. All the camels of the Arabs were being driven from the country; we had already met many herds travelling northward, but this day's march was through crowds of these animals, principally females with their young, many thousands of which were on the road. Some of the young foals were so small that they could not endure the march; these were slung in nets upon the backs of camels, while the mother followed behind. We revelled in milk, as we had not been able to procure it since we left Cassala. Some persons dislike the milk of the camel; I think it is excellent to drink pure, but it does not answer in general use for mixing with coffee, with which it

immediately curdles; it is extremely rich, and is considered by the Arabs to be more nourishing than that of the cow. To persons of delicate health I should invariably recommend boiled milk in preference to plain; and should the digestion be so extremely weak that liquid milk disagrees with the stomach, they should allow it to become thick, similar to curds and whey: this should be then beaten together, with the admixture of a little salt and cayenne pepper; it then assumes the thickness of cream, and is very palatable. The Arabs generally prepare it in this manner; it is not only considered to be more wholesome, but in its thickened state it is easier to carry upon a journey. With an apology to European medical men, I would suggest that they should try the Arab system whenever they prescribe a milk diet for a delicate patient. The first operation of curdling, which is a severe trial to a weak stomach, is performed in hot climates by the atmosphere, as in temperate climates by the admixture of rennet, &c.; thus the most difficult work of the stomach is effected by a foreign agency, and it is spared the first act of its performance. I have witnessed almost marvellous results from a milk diet given as now advised.

Milk, if drunk warm from the animal in hot climates will affect many persons in the same manner as a powerful dose of senna and salts. Our party appeared to be proof against such an accident, as they drank enough to have stocked a moderate-sized dairy. This was most good-naturedly supplied gratis by the Arabs.

It was the season of rejoicing; everybody appeared in good humour; the distended udders of thousands of camels were an assurance of plenty. The burning sun that for nine months had scorched the earth was veiled by passing clouds; the cattle that had panted for water, and whose food was withered straw, were filled with juicy fodder: the camels that had subsisted upon the dried and leafless twigs and branches, now feasted upon the succulent tops of the mimosas. Throngs of women and children mounted upon camels, protected by the peculiar gaudy saddle hood, ornamented with cowrie-shells, accompanied the march; thousands of sheep and goats, driven by Arab boys, were straggling in all directions; baggage-camels, heavily laden with the quaint household goods, blocked up the way; the fine bronzed figures of Arabs, with sword and shield, and white topes, or plaids, guided their milk-white dromedaries through the confused throng with the usual placid dignity of their race, simply passing by with the usual greeting, "Salaam aleikum," "Peace be with you."

It was the Exodus; all were hurrying towards the promised land—"the land flowing with milk and honey," where men and beasts would be secure, not only from the fevers of the south, but from that deadly enemy to camels and cattle, the fly; this terrible insect drove all before it.

If all were right in migrating to the north, it was a logical conclusion that we were wrong in going to the south during the rainy season; however, we now heard from the Arabs that we

were within a couple of hours' march from the camp of the great Sheik Achmet Abou Sinn, to whom I had a letter of introduction. At the expiration of about that time we halted, and pitched the tents among some shady mimosas, while I sent Mahomet to Abou Sinn with the letter, and my firman.

I was busily engaged in making sundry necessary arrangements in the tent, when Mahomet returned, and announced the arrival of the great sheik in person. He was attended by several of his principal people, and as he approached through the bright green mimosas, mounted upon a beautiful snow-white hygeen, I was exceedingly struck with his venerable and dignified appearance. Upon near arrival I went forward to meet him, and to assist him from his camel; but his animal knelt immediately at his command, and he dismounted with the ease and agility of a man of twenty.

He was the most magnificent specimen of an Arab that I have ever seen. Although upwards of eighty years of age, he was as erect as a lance, and did not appear more than between fifty and sixty; he was of Herculean stature, about six feet three inches high, with immensely broad shoulders and chest; a remarkably arched nose; eyes like an eagle, beneath large, shaggy, but perfectly white eyebrows; a snow-white beard of great thickness descended below the middle of his breast. He wore a large white turban, and a white cashmere abbai, or long robe, from the throat to the ankles. As a desert patriarch he was superb, the very perfection of all that the imagination could

paint, if we would personify Abraham at the head of his people. This grand old Arab with the greatest politeness insisted upon our immediately accompanying him to his camp, as he could not allow us to remain in his country as strangers. He would hear of no excuses, but he at once gave orders to Mahomet to have the baggage repacked and the tents removed, while we were requested to mount two superb white hygeens, with saddle-cloths of blue Persian sheep-skins, that he had immediately accoutred when he heard from Mahomet of our miserable camels. The tent was struck, and we joined our venerable host with a line of wild and splendidly-mounted attendants, who followed us towards the sheik's encampment.

CHAPTER VI
SHEIK ACHMET ABOU SINN

AMONG the retinue of the aged sheik, whom we now accompanied, were ten of his sons, some of whom appeared to be quite as old as their father. We had ridden about two miles, when we were suddenly met by a crowd of mounted men, armed with the usual swords and shields; many were on horses, others upon hygeens, and all drew up in lines parallel with our approach. These were Abou Sinn's people, who had assembled to give us the honorary welcome as guests of their chief; this etiquette of the Arabs consists in galloping singly at full speed across the line of advance, the rider flourishing the sword over his head, and at the same moment reining up his horse upon its haunches so as to bring it to a sudden halt. This having been performed by about a hundred riders upon both horses and hygeens, they fell into line behind our party, and, thus escorted, we shortly arrived at the Arab encampment. In all countries the warmth of a public welcome appears to be exhibited by noise—the whole neighbourhood had congregated to meet us; crowds of women raised the wild shrill cry that is sounded alike for joy or sorrow; drums were beat; men dashed about with drawn swords and engaged in mimic fight, and in the midst of din and confusion we halted and dismounted. With peculiar grace of manner the

old sheik assisted my wife to dismount, and led her to an open shed arranged with angareps (stretchers) covered with Persian carpets and cushions, so as to form a divan. Sherbet, pipes, and coffee were shortly handed to us, and Mahomet, as dragoman, translated the customary interchange of compliments; the sheik assured us that our unexpected arrival among them was "like the blessing of a new moon," the depth of which expression no one can understand who has not experienced life in the desert, where the first faint crescent is greeted with such enthusiasm. After a long conversation we were led to an excellent mat tent that had been vacated by one of his sons, and shortly afterwards an admirable dinner of several dishes was sent to us, while with extreme good taste we were left undisturbed by visitors until the following morning. Our men had been regaled with a fat sheep, presented by the sheik, and all slept contentedly.

At sunrise we were visited by Abou Sinn. It appeared that, after our conversation of the preceding evening, he had inquired of Mahomet concerning my future plans and intentions; he now came specially to implore us not to proceed south at this season of the year, as it would be perfectly impossible to travel; he described the country as a mass of mud, rendered so deep by the rains that no animal could move; that the fly called the "seroot" had appeared, and that no domestic animal except a goat could survive its attack; he declared that to continue our route would be mere insanity: and he concluded by giving us a most hospitable invitation to join his people on their road to

the healthy country at Gozerajup, and to become his guests for three or four months, until travelling would be feasible in the south, at which time he promised to assist me in my explorations by an escort of his own people, who were celebrated elephant hunters, and knew the entire country before us. This was an alluring programme; but after thanking him for his kindness, I explained how much I disliked to retrace my steps, which I should do by returning to Gozerajup; and that as I had heard of a German who was living at the village of Sofi, on the Atbara, I should prefer to pass the season of the rains at that place, where I could gather information, and be ready on the spot to start for the neighbouring Base country when the change of season should permit. After some hesitation he consented to this plan, and promised not only to mount us on our journey, but to send with us an escort commanded by one of his grandsons. Sofi was about seventy-eight miles distant.

Abou Sinn had arranged to move northwards on the following day; we therefore agreed to pass one day in his camp, and to leave for Sofi the next morning. The ground upon which the Arab encampment was situated was a tolerably flat surface, like a shelf, upon the slope of the Atbara valley, about thirty or forty feet below the rich table lands; the surface of this was perfectly firm, as by the constant rains it had been entirely denuded of the loam that had formed the upper stratum. This formed a charming place for the encampment of a large party, as the ground was perfectly clean, a mixture of quartz pebbles upon a hard white sandstone.

Numerous mimosas afforded a shade, beneath which the Arabs sat in groups, and at the bottom of the valley flowed the Atbara.

This tribe, which was peculiarly that of Abou Sinn, and from which he had sprung, was the Shookeriyah, one of the most powerful among the numerous tribes of Upper Egypt.

From Korosko to this point we had already passed the Bedouins, Bishareens, Hadendowas, Hallongas, until we had entered the Shookeriyahs. On the west of our present position were the Jalyns, and to the south near Sofi were the Dabainas. Many of the tribes claim a right to the title of Bedouins, as descended from that race. The customs of all the Arabs are nearly similar, and the distinction in appearance is confined to a peculiarity in dressing the hair; this is a matter of great importance among both men and women. It would be tedious to describe the minutiae of the various coiffures, but the great desire with all tribes, except the Jalyn, is to have a vast quantity of hair arranged in their own peculiar fashion, and not only smeared, but covered with as much fat as can be made to adhere. Thus, should a man wish to get himself up as a great dandy, he would put at least half a pound of butter or other fat upon his head; this would be worked up with his coarse locks by a friend, until it somewhat resembled a cauliflower. He would then arrange his tope or plaid of thick cotton cloth, and throw one end over his left shoulder, while slung from the same shoulder his circular shield would hang upon his back; suspended by a strap over the right shoulder would hang his long two-edged broadsword.

Fat is the great desideratum of an Arab; his head, as I have described, should be a mass of grease; he rubs his body with oil or other ointment; his clothes, i.e. his one garment or tope, is covered with grease, and internally he swallows as much as he can procure.

The great Sheik Abou Sinn, who is upwards of eighty, as upright as a dart, a perfect Hercules, and whose children and grandchildren are like the sand of the sea-shore, has always consumed daily throughout his life two rottolis (pounds) of melted butter. A short time before I left the country he married a new young wife about fourteen years of age. This may be a hint to octogenarians.

The fat most esteemed for dressing the hair is that of the sheep. This undergoes a curious preparation, which renders it similar in appearance to cold cream; upon the raw fat being taken from the animal it is chewed in the mouth by an Arab for about two hours, being frequently taken out for examination during that time, until it has assumed the desired consistency. To prepare sufficient to enable a man to appear in full dress, several persons must be employed in masticating fat at the same time. This species of pomade, when properly made, is perfectly white, and exceedingly light and frothy. It may be imagined that when exposed to a burning sun, the beauty of the head-dress quickly disappears, but the oil then runs down the neck and back, which is considered quite correct, especially when the tope becomes thoroughly greased; the man is then perfectly anointed.

We had seen an amusing exanmple of this when on the march from Berber to Gozerajup. The Turk, Hadji Achmet, had pressed into our service, as a guide for a few miles, a dandy who had just been arranged as a cauliflower, with at least half a pound of white fat upon his head. As we were travelling upwards of four miles an hour in an intense heat, during which he was obliged to run, the fat ran quicker than he did, and at the end of a couple of hours both the dandy and his pomade were exhausted; the poor fellow had to return to his friends with the total loss of personal appearance and half a pound of butter.

Not only are the Arabs particular in their pomade, but great attention is bestowed upon perfumery, especially by the women. Various perfumes are brought from Cairo by the travelling native merchants; among which those most in demand are oil of roses, oil of sandalwood, an essence from the blossom of a species of mimosa, essence of musk, and the oil of cloves. The women have a peculiar method of scenting their bodies and clothes by an operation that is considered to be one of the necessaries of life, and which is repeated at regular intervals. In the floor of the tent, or hut, as it may chance to be, a small hole is excavated sufficiently large to contain a common-sized champagne bottle: a fire of charcoal, or of simply glowing enmbers, is made within the hole, into which the woman about to be scented throws a handful of various drugs; she then takes off the cloth or tope which forms her dress, and crouches naked over the fumes, while she arranges her robe to fall as a mantle from her neck to the

ground like a tent. When this arrangement is concluded she is perfectly happy, as none of the precious fumes can escape, all being retained beneath the robe, precisely as if she wore a crinoline with an incense-burner beneath it, which would be a far more simple way of performing the operation. She now begins to perspire freely in the hot-air bath, and the pores of the skin being thus opened and moist, the volatile oil from the smoke of the burning perfumes is immediately absorbed.

By the time that the fire has expired, the scenting process is completed, and both her person and robe are redolent of incense, with which they are so thoroughly impregnated that I have frequently smelt a party of women strongly at full a hundred yards' distance, when the wind has been blowing from their direction. Of course this kind of perfumery is only adapted for those who live in tents and in the open air, but it is considered by the ladies to have a peculiar attraction for the other sex, as valerian is said to ensnare the genus felis. As the men are said to be allured by this particular combination of sweet smells, and to fall victims to the delicacy of their nasal organs, it will be necessary to give the receipt for the fatal mixture, to be made up in proportions according to taste :—Ginger, cloves, cinnamon, frankincense, sandal-wood, myrrh, a species of sea-weed that is brought from the Red Sea, and lastly, what I mistook for shells, but which I subsequently discovered to be the horny disc that closes the aperture when a shell-fish withdraws itself within its shell; these are also brought from the Red Sea, in which

they abound throughout the shores of Nubia and Abyssinia. In addition to the charm of sweet perfumes, the women who can afford the luxury, suspend from their necks a few pieces of the dried glands of the musk cat, which is a native of the country; such an addition completes the toilet, when the coiffure has been carefully arranged.

Hair-dressing in all parts of the world, both civilized and savage, is a branch of science; savage negro tribes are distinguished by the various arrangements of their woolly heads. Arabs are marked by similar peculiarities, that have never changed for thousands of years, and may be yet seen depicted upon the walls of Egyptian temples in the precise forms as worn at present, while in modern times the perfection of art has been in the wig of a Lord Chancellor. Although this latter example of the result of science is not the actual hair of the wearer, it adds an imposing glow of wisdom to the general appearance, and may have originated as a necessity where a deficiency of sagacity had existed, and where the absence of years required the fictitious crown of grey old age. A barrister in his wig, and the same amount of learning without the wig, is a very different affair; he is an imperfect shadow of himself. Nevertheless, among civilized nations, the men do not generally bestow much anxiety upon the fashion of their hair; the labour in this branch of art is generally performed by the women, who in all countries and climes, and in every stage of civilization, bestow the greatest pains upon the perfection of the coiffure,

the various arrangements of which might, I should imagine, be estimated by the million. In some countries they are not even contented with the natural colour of the hair, either if black or blonde, but they use a pigment that turns it red. I only noticed this among the Somauli tribe; and that of the Nuehr, some of the wildest savages of the White Nile, until I returned to England, where I found the custom was becoming general among the civilized, and that ladies were adopting the lovely tint of the British fox. The Arab women do not indulge in fashions; strictly conservative in their manners and customs, they never imitate, but they simply vie with each other in the superlativeness of their own style; thus the dressing of the hair is a most elaborate affair, which occupies a considerable portion of their time. It is quite impossible for an Arab woman to arrange her own hair; she therefore employs an assistant, who, if clever in the art, will generally occupy about three days before it is satisfactorily concluded. First, the hair must be combed with a long skewer-like pin; then, when well divided, it becomes possible to use an exceedingly coarse wooden comb. When the hair is reduced to reasonable order by the latter process, a vigorous hunt takes place, which occupies about an hour, according to the amount of game preserved; the sport concluded, the hair is rubbed with a mixture of oil of roses, myrrh, and sandal-wood dust mixed with a powder of cloves and cassia. When well greased and rendered somewhat stiff by the solids thus introduced, it is plaited into at least two hundred fine plaits; each of these plaits is then smeared

with a mixture of sandal-wood dust and either gum water or paste of dhurra flour. On the last day of the operation, each tiny plait is carefully opened by the long hair-pin or skewer, and the head is ravissante. Scented and frizzled in this manner, with a well-greased tope or robe, the Arab lady's toilet is complete, her head is then a little larger than the largest sized English mop, and her perfume is something between the aroma of a perfumer's shop and the monkey-house at the Zoological Gardens. This is considered "very killing," and I have been quite of that opinion when a crowd of women have visited my wife in our tent, with the thermometer at 95 degrees, and they have kindly consented to allow me to remain as one of the party. It is hardly necessary to add, that the operation of hair-dressing is not often performed, but that the effect is permanent for about a week, during which time the game become so excessively lively, that the creatures require stirring up with the long hair-pin or skewer whenever too unruly; this appears to be constantly necessary from the vigorous employment of the ruling sceptre during conversation. A levee of Arab women in the tent was therefore a disagreeable invasion, as we dreaded the fugitives; fortunately, they appeared to cling to the followers of Mahomet in preference to Christians.

The plague of lice brought upon the Egyptians by Moses has certainly adhered to the country ever since, if "lice" is the proper translation of the Hebrew word in the Old Testament: it is my own opinion that the insects thus inflicted upon the population were not lice, but ticks. Exod. viii. 16, "The dust became lice

throughout all Egypt;" again, Exod. viii. 17, "Smote dust . . . it became lice in man and beast." Now the louse that infects the human body and hair has no connexion whatever with "dust," and if subject to a few hours' exposure to the dry heat of the burning sand, it would shrivel and die; but the tick is an inhabitant of the dust, a dry horny insect without any apparent moisture in its composition; it lives in hot sand and dust, where it cannot possibly obtain nourishment, until some wretched animal should lie down upon the spot, and become covered with these horrible vermin. I have frequently seen desert places so infested with ticks, that the ground was perfectly alive with them, and it would have been impossible to have rested on the earth; in such spots, the passage in Exodus has frequently occurred to me as bearing reference to these vermin, which are the greatest enemies to man and beast. It is well known that, from the size of a grain of sand in their natural state, they will distend to the size of a hazel-nut after having preyed for some days upon the blood of an animal. The Arabs are invariably infested with lice, not only in their hair, but upon their bodies and clothes; even the small charms or spells worn upon the arm in neatly-sewn leathern packets are full of these vermin. Such spells are generally verses copied from the Koran by the Faky, or priest, who receives some small gratuity in exchange; the men wear several of such talismans upon the arm above the elbow, but the women wear a large bunch of charms, as a sort of chatelaine, suspended beneath their clothes round the waist. Although the tope or robe, loosely but

gracefully arranged around the body, appears to be the whole of the costume, the women wear beneath this garment a thin blue cotton cloth tightly bound round the loins, which descends to a little above the knee; beneath this, next to the skin, is the last garment, the rahat—the latter is the only clothing of young girls, and may be either perfectly simple or adorned with beads and cowrie shells according to the fancy of the wearer; it is perfectly effective as a dress, and admirably adapted to the climate.

The rahat is a fringe of fine dark brown or reddish twine, fastened to a belt, and worn round the waist. On either side are two long tassels, that are generally ornamented with beads or cowries, and dangle nearly to the ankles, while the rahat itself should descend to a little above the knee, rather shorter than a Highland kilt. Nothing can be prettier or more simple than this dress, which, although short, is of such thickly hanging fringe, that it perfectly answers the purpose for which it is intended. Many of the Arab girls are remarkably good-looking, with fine figures until they become mothers. They generally marry at the age of thirteen or fourteen, but frequently at twelve, or even earlier. Until married, the rahat is their sole garment. Throughout the Arab tribes of Upper Egypt, chastity is a necessity, as an operation is performed at the early age of from three to five years that thoroughly protects all females, and which renders them physically proof against incontinency.

There is but little love-making among the Arabs. The affair of matrimony usually commences by a present to the father of the

girl, which, if accepted, is followed by a similar advance to the girl herself, and the arrangement is completed. All the friends of both parties are called together for the wedding; pistols and guns are fired off, if possessed. There is much feasting, and the unfortunate bridegroom undergoes the ordeal of whipping by the relations of his bride, in order to test his courage. Sometimes this punishment is exceedingly severe, being inflicted with the coorbatch or whip of hippopotamus hide, which is cracked vigorously about his ribs and back. If the happy husband wishes to be considered a man worth having, he must receive the chastisement with an expression of enjoyment; in which case the crowds of women again raise their thrilling cry in admiration. After the rejoicings of the day are over, the bride is led in the evening to the residence of her husband, while a beating of drums and strumming of guitars (rhababas) are kept up for some hours during the night, with the usual discordant idea of singing.

There is no divorce court among the Arabs. They are not sufficiently advanced in civilization to accept a pecuniary fine as the price of a wife's dishonour; but a stroke of the husband's sword, or a stab with the knife, is generally the ready remedy for infidelity. Although strictly Mahometans, the women are never veiled; neither do they adopt the excessive reserve assumed by the Turks and Egyptians. The Arab women are generally idle; and one of the conditions of accepting a suitor is, that a female slave is to be provided for the special use of the wife. No Arab woman will engage herself as a domestic servant; thus, so long as their

present customs shall remain unchanged, slaves are creatures of necessity. Although the law of Mahomet limits the number of wives for each man to four at one time, the Arab women do not appear to restrict their husbands to this allowance, and the slaves of the establishment occupy the position of concubines.

The customs of the Arabs in almost every detail have remained unchanged. Thus, in dress, in their nomadic habits, food, the anointing with oil (Eccles. ix. 8, "Let thy garments be always white, and let thy head lack no ointment"), they retain the habits and formalities of the distant past, and the present is but the exact picture of those periods which are historically recorded in the Old Testament. The perfumery of the women already described, bears a resemblance to that prepared by Moses for the altar, which was forbidden to be used by the people. "Take thou also unto thee principal spices, of pure myrrh five hundred shekels, and of sweet cinnamon half so much, even two hundred and fifty shekels, and of sweet calamus two hundred and fifty shekels, and of cassia five hundred shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, and of oil olive an hin: and thou shalt make it an oil of holy ointment, an ointment compound after the art of the apothecary: it shall be an holy anointing oil."—Exod. xxx. 23-25.

The manner of anointing by the ancients is exhibited by the Arabs at the present day, who, as I have already described, make use of so large a quantity of grease at one application that, when melted, it runs down over their persons and clothes. In Ps. cxxxiii. 2, "It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down

upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, that went down to the skirts of his garments."

In all hot climates, oil or other fat is necessary to the skin as a protection from the sun, where the body is either naked or very thinly clad. I have frequently seen both Arabs and the negro tribes of Africa suffer great discomfort when for some days the supply of grease has been exhausted; the skin has become coarse, rough, almost scaly, and peculiarly unsightly, until the much-loved fat has been obtained, and the general appearance of smoothness has been at once restored by an active smearing. The expression in Ps. civ. 15, "And oil to make his face to shine," describes the effect that was then considered beautifying, as it is at the present time.

The Arabs generally adhere strictly to their ancient customs, independently of the comparatively recent laws established by Mahomet. Thus, concubinage is not considered a breach of morality; neither is it regarded by the legitimate wives with jealousy. They attach great importance to the laws of Moses, and to the customs of their forefathers; neither can they understand the reason for a change of habit in any respect where necessity has not suggested the reform. The Arabs are creatures of necessity; their nomadic life is compulsory, as the existence of their flocks and herds depends upon the pasturage. Thus, with the change of seasons they must change their localities, according to the presence of fodder for their cattle. Driven to and fro by the accidents of climate, the Arab has been compelled to become

a wanderer; and precisely as the wild beasts of the country are driven from place to place either by the arrival of the fly, the lack of pasturage, or by the want of water, even so must the flocks of the Arab obey the law of necessity, in a country where the burning sun and total absence of rain for nine months of the year convert the green pastures into a sandy desert. The Arabs and their herds must follow the example of the wild beasts, and live as wild and wandering a life. In the absence of a fixed home, without a city, or even a village that is permanent, there can be no change of custom. There is no stimulus to competition in the style of architecture that is to endure only for a few months; no municipal laws suggest deficiencies that originate improvements. The Arab cannot halt in one spot longer than the pasturage will support his flocks; therefore his necessity is food for his beasts. The object of his life being fodder, he must wander in search of the ever-changing supply. His wants must be few, as the constant changes of encampment necessitate the transport of all his household goods; thus he reduces to a minimum the domestic furniture and utensils. No desires for strange and fresh objects excite his mind to improvement, or alter his original habits; he must limit his impedimenta, not increase them. Thus with a few necessary articles he is contented. Mats for his tent, ropes manufactured with the hair of his goats and camels, pots for carrying fat; water-jars and earthenware pots or gourd-shells for containing milk; leather water-skins for the desert, and sheep-skin bags for his clothes,—these are the requirements of the

Arabs. Their patterns have never changed, but the water-jar of to-day is of the same form that was carried to the well by the women of thousands of years ago. The conversation of the Arabs is in the exact style of the Old Testament. The name of God is coupled with every trifling incident in life, and they believe in the continual action of Divine special interference. Should a famine afflict the country, it is expressed in the stern language of the Bible—"The Lord has sent a grievous famine upon the land;" or, "The Lord called for a famine, and it came upon the land." Should their cattle fall sick, it is considered to be an affliction by Divine command; or should the flocks prosper and multiply particularly during one season, the prosperity is attributed to special interference. Nothing can happen in the usual routine of daily life without a direct connexion with the hand of God, according to the Arab's belief.

This striking similarity to the descriptions of the Old Testament is exceedingly interesting to a traveller when residing among these curious and original people. With the Bible in one hand, and these unchanged tribes before the eyes, there is a thrilling illustration of the sacred record; the past becomes the present; the veil of three thousand years is raised, and the living picture is a witness to the exactness of the historical description. At the same time, there is a light thrown upon many obscure passages in the Old Testament by the experience of the present customs and figures of speech of the Arabs which are precisely those that were practised at the periods described. I

do not attempt to enter upon a theological treatise, therefore it is unnecessary to allude specially to these particular points. The sudden and desolating arrival of a flight of locusts, the plague, or any other unforeseen calamity, is attributed to the anger of God, and is believed to be an infliction of punishment upon the people thus visited, precisely as the plagues of Egypt were specially inflicted upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

Should the present history of the country be written by an Arab scribe, the style of the description would be purely that of the Old Testament; and the various calamities or the good fortunes that have in the course of nature befallen both the tribes and individuals, would be recounted either as special visitations of Divine wrath, or blessings for good deeds performed. If in a dream a particular course of action is suggested, the Arab believes that God has spoken and directed him. The Arab scribe or historian would describe the event as the "voice of the Lord" ("kallam el Allah"), having spoken unto the person; or, that God appeared to him in a dream and "said," &c. Thus much allowance would be necessary on the part of a European reader for the figurative ideas and expressions of the people. As the Arabs are unchanged, the theological opinions which they now hold are the same as those which prevailed in remote ages, with the simple addition of their belief in Mahomet as the Prophet.

There is a fascination in the unchangeable features of the Nile regions. There are the vast Pyramids that have defied time; the river upon which Moses was cradled in infancy; the same sandy

deserts through which he led his people; and the watering-places where their flocks were led to drink. The wild and wandering tribes of Arabs who thousands of years ago dug out the wells in the wilderness, are represented by their descendants unchanged, who now draw water from the deep wells of their forefathers with the skins that have never altered their fashion. The Arabs, gathering with their goats and sheep around the wells to-day, recall the recollection of that distant time when "Jacob went on his journey, and came into the land of the people of the east. And he looked, and behold a well in the field; and, lo, there were three flocks of sheep lying by it, for out of that well they watered the flocks; and a great stone was upon the well's mouth. And thither were all the flocks gathered; and they rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the sheep, and put the stone again upon the well's mouth in his place." The picture of that scene would be an illustration of Arab daily life in the Nubian deserts, where the present is the mirror of the past.

CHAPTER VII
THE DEPARTURE

ON the morning of the 25th July, 1861, Abou Sinn arrived at our tent with a number of his followers, in their whitest apparel, accompanied by one of his grandsons, Sheik Ali, who was to command our escort and to accompany us to the frontier of the Dabaina tribe, at which spot we were to be handed over to the care of the sheik of those Arabs, Atalan Wat Said, who would conduct us to Sofi. There were two superb hygeens duly equipped for my wife and myself: they were snow-white, without speck or blemish, and as clean and silk-like as good grooming could accomplish. One of these beautiful creatures I subsequently measured,—seven feet three and a half inches to the top of the hump; this was much above the average. The baggage-camels were left to the charge of the servants, and we were requested to mount immediately, as the Sheik Abou Sinn was determined to accompany us for some distance as a mark of courtesy, although he was himself to march with his people on that day in the opposite direction towards Gozerajup. Escorted by our grand old host, with a great number of mounted attendants, we left the hospitable camp, and followed the margin of the Atbara valley towards the south, until, at the distance of about two miles, Abou Sinn took leave, and returned with his people.

We now enjoyed the contrast between the light active step of first-class hygeens, and the heavy swinging action of the camels we had hitherto ridden. Travelling was for the first time a pleasure; there was a delightful movement in the elasticity of the hygeens, who ambled at about five miles and a half an hour, as their natural pace; this they can continue for nine or ten hours without fatigue. Having no care for the luggage, and the coffee-pot being slung upon the saddle of an attendant, who also carried our carpet, we were perfectly independent, as we were prepared with the usual luxuries upon halting,—the carpet to recline upon beneath a shady tree, and a cup of good Turkish coffee. Thus we could afford to travel at a rapid rate, and await the arrival of the baggage-camels at the end of the day's journey. In this manner the march should be arranged in these wild countries, where there is no resting-place upon the path beyond the first inviting shade that suggests a halt. The day's journey should be about twenty-four miles. A loaded camel seldom exceeds two miles and a half per hour; at this rate nearly ten hours would be consumed upon the road daily, during which time the traveller would be exposed to the intense heat of the sun, and to the fatigue inseparable from a long and slow march. A servant mounted upon a good hygeen should accompany him with the coffee apparatus and a cold roast fowl and biscuits; the ever necessary carpet should form the cover to his saddle, to be ready when required; he then rides far in advance of the caravan. This simple arrangement insures comfort, and lessens

the ennui of the journey; the baggage-camels are left in charge of responsible servants, to be brought forward at their usual pace, until they shall arrive at the place selected for the halt by the traveller. The usual hour of starting is about 5.30 A.M. The entire day's journey can be accomplished in something under five hours upon hygeens, instead of the ten hours dreary pace of the caravan; thus, the final halt would be made at about 10.30 A.M. at which time the traveller would be ready for breakfast. The carpet would be spread under a shady tree; upon a branch of this his water-skin should be suspended, and the day's work over, he can write up his journal and enjoy his pipe while coffee is being prepared. After breakfast he can take his gun or rifle and explore the neighbourhood, until the baggage-camels shall arrive in the evening, by which time, if he is a sportsman, he will have procured something for the dinner of the entire party. The servants will have collected firewood, and all will be ready for the arrival of the caravan, without the confusion and bustle of a general scramble, inseparable from the work to be suddenly performed, when camels must be unloaded, fuel collected, fires lighted, the meals prepared, beds made, &c. &c. all at the same moment, with the chance of little to eat. Nothing keeps the camel-drivers and attendants in such good humour as a successful rifle. While they are on their long and slow march, they speculate upon the good luck that may attend the master's gun, and upon arrival at the general bivouac in the evening they are always on the alert to skin and divide the antelopes, pluck the guinea-fowls,

&c. &c. We now travelled in this delightful manner; there were great numbers of guinea-fowl throughout the country, which was the same everlasting flat and rich table land, extending for several hundred miles to the south, and dotted with green mimosas; while upon our left was the broken valley of the Atbara.

The only drawback to the journey was the rain. At about 2 P.M. daily we were subjected to a violent storm, which generally lasted until the evening; and although our guides invariably hurried forward on the march to the neighbourhood of some deserted huts, whose occupants had migrated north, our baggage and servants upon the road were exposed to the storm, and arrived late in the evening, wet and miserable. There could be no doubt that the season for travelling was past. Every day's journey south had proved by the increased vegetation that we were invading the rainy zone, and that, although the northern deserts possessed their horrors of sandy desolation, they at the same time afforded that great advantage to the traveller, a dry climate.

In a few rapid marches we arrived at Tomat, the commencement of the Dabainas and the principal head-quarters of the sheik of that tribe, Atalan Wat Said. This was a lovely spot, where the country appeared like green velvet, as the delicate young grass was about two inches above the ground. The Arab camp was situated upon a series of knolls about a hundred and fifty feet above the Atbara, upon the hard ground denuded by the rains, as this formed a portion of the valley. At this spot,

the valley on the west bank of the river was about two miles broad, and exhibited the usual features of innumerable knolls, ravines, and landslips, in succession, like broken terraces from the high level table land, sloping down irregularly to the water's edge. On the opposite side of the river was the most important feature of the country; the land on the east bank was considerably higher than upon the west, and a long tongue formed a bluff cliff that divided the Atbara valley from the sister valley of the Settite, which, corresponding exactly in character and apparent dimensions, joined that of the Atbara from the S.E., forming an angle like the letter V, in a sudden bend of the river. Through the valley of the eastern bank flowed the grand river Settite, which here formed a junction with the Atbara.

Looking down upon the beautifully wooded banks of the two rivers at this interesting point, we rode leisurely across a ravine, and ascended a steep incline of bright green grass, upon the summit of which was a fine level space of several acres that formed the Arab head-quarters. This surface was nearly covered with the usual mat tents, and in a few moments our camels knelt before that of the sheik, at which we dismounted. A crowd of inquisitive Arabs surrounded us upon seeing so large a party of hygeens, and the firman having been delivered by our guide, Sheik Ali, we were almost immediately visited by Sheik Atalan Wat Said. He was a man in the prime of life, of an intelligent countenance, and he received us with much politeness, immediately ordering a fat sheep to be brought and slaughtered

for our acceptance.

The usual welcome upon the arrival of a traveller, who is well received in an Arab camp, is the sacrifice of a fat sheep, that should be slaughtered at the door of his hut or tent, so that the blood flows to the threshold. This custom has evidently some connexion with the ancient rites of sacrifice. Should an important expedition be undertaken, a calf is slaughtered at the entrance of the camp, and every individual steps over the body as the party starts upon the enterprise.

Upon learning my plans, he begged us to remain through the rainy season at Tomat, as it was the head-quarters of a party of Egyptian irregular troops, who would assist me in every way. This was no great temptation, as they were the people whom I most wished to avoid; I therefore explained that I was bound to Sofi by the advice of Abou Sinn, from whence I could easily return if I thought proper, but I wished to proceed on the following morning. He promised to act as our guide, and that hygeens should be waiting at the tent-door at sunrise. After our interview, I strolled down to the river's side and shot some guinea-fowl.

The Settite is the river par excellence, as it is the principal stream of Abyssinia, in which country it bears the name of "Tacazzy." Above the junction, the Atbara does not exceed two hundred yards in width. Both rivers have scooped out deep and broad valleys throughout their course; this fact confirmed my first impression of the supply of soil having been brought down

by the Atbara to the Nile. The country on the opposite or eastern bank of the Atbara is contested ground; in reality it forms the western frontier of Abyssinia, of which the Atbara river is the boundary, but since the annexation of the Nubian provinces to Egypt there has been no safety for life or property upon the line of frontier; thus a large tract of country actually forming a portion of Abyssinia is uninhabited.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.