Khartoum, and the Blue and White Niles, Vol. 2 (of 2)

George Melly

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KHARTOUM,

AND

THE BLUE AND WHITE NILES.

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KHARTOUM,

AND

THE BLUE AND WHITE NILES.

BY GEORGE MELLY.

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KHARTOUM,

AND

THE BLUE AND WHITE NILES.

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CHAPTER I.

Preparations for a start — Camel-riding — Our encampment — Partridges — Temple at Samneh — A jackall hunt — Eagles — Picturesque country — Alkaline hot springs.

The bargain for conveying us across the desert had already been struck, and we had arranged everything to start at day-break; but the

camels had not arrived when it wanted but an hour of noon, and then there was the process of loading to accomplish.

We were not allowed to have the scene entirely to ourselves. Every ferry-boat had brought at least a dozen gazers from Wadeh Halfea, and the bank could boast an unusual collection of picturesque objects, looking in the distance like bundles of white linen, surmounted by curly heads; while here and there a camel lay groaning, in apparent anticipation of the coming burthen. Prominent in the fore-ground, was the Camel Sheik, sedately smoking his tchibouque, while enduring our united abuse for having shown so little respect to the terms of his agreement. The space all around us that was not occupied by living packages, was strewn with baggage of every description.

At last, the camels having arrived, the men begin to display considerable activity in removing our belongings, and a great deal of ingenuity in adjusting them in nicely-balanced heaps across the backs of the poor beasts that had been engaged for their transport, whose melancholy howls proclaimed their protest against the heaviness of their task. Happy, above all his fellows, must have been the poor wretch to whom had been assigned our respectable hen-coop, containing three turkeys, and fifty hens, which was balanced on the other side by a capacious bag of rice, and triumphantly surmounted by the kitchen-table: wretched beyond the whole wretched lot, must have been he who bore the huge boxes of culinary utensils swung on each side of him. But he did not seem an object of pity, for he was a magnificent fellow, quite white, and standing twelve hands high at the lower point of the shoulder; and though he kept up a tremendous uproar, while his burthen was being adjusted to his back, no sooner was the process complete, than he stalked away to the Desert under

eight hundred weight and a half, apparently as much at his ease as a London dray-horse with an empty barrel.

The noise increases, the more restive of the camels being assailed with terrible shouts, and sometimes with severe blows; but the whole eleven are at last accommodated, some with tents, some with water-casks and provisions, necessary to last our numerous party for two months; and all with a freight worthy of their well-deserved title, “Ships of the Desert.” And now the travellers must as quickly as possible reconcile themselves to their own mode of transit.

Our servant Mahomed, and our cook Abbas—the former sufficiently grotesque in his desert costume, the latter rendered formidable by the addition of a pair of monstrous pistols—looked wonderfully picturesque, as they passed slowly along on the top of their dromedary; six others await our selection: a small brown one falls to my share. On him my immense saddle-bags are fastened, containing my wardrobe and bedding: upon these are fixed my mattrass and pillow, with my gun secured behind. The pummel is hung with a satchel, in which are deposited various travelling resources—a Shakspeare, powder and bullets, tobacco and biscuit, pipe, whip, and water-bottle. What I resembled I cannot pretend to say, but I thought my brother appeared very like a travelling pedlar; his rifle, double-barrelled gun, powder-horn, water-skin, and last not least in request, “Macaulay’s England,” constituting but a very small portion of his stock. The ladies, mattrassed up, looked at least very cosy on their pillowy nest.

The process necessary towards obtaining that elevation must here be detailed, in deference to those of our readers who may be curious to

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