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**A Narrative of the Expedition to
Dongola and Sennar Under the
Command of His Excellence
Ismael Pasha, undertaken by
Order of His Highness
Mehemmed Ali Pasha, Viceroy of
Egypt, By An American In The
Service Of The Viceroy**

George Bethune English

Imprint

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TO
HIS BRITANNIC MAJESTY'S
CONSUL GENERAL IN EGYPT,
HENRY SALT, ESQ.

MY FATHERLY FRIEND IN A FOREIGN LAND, THIS
WORK IS DEDICATED, WITH AFFECTIONATE RESPECT,
BY
THE AUTHOR:

AND RECOMMENDED TO THE KIND CARE AND PAT-
RONAGE OF

JOHN WILLIAM BANKES, ESQ.

BY HIS OBLIGED FRIEND AND SERVANT,

HENRY SALT.

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PREFACE

MEHEMMED ALI PASHA, the victorious pacificator of Egypt and Arabia, is already renowned in the civilized world. Egypt, once the home of discord and the headquarters of anarchy, under his administration has long enjoyed peace and prosperity; is permeable in all directions, and in perfect safety to the merchant and the traveler, and is yearly progressing in wealth and improvement.¹

The Viceroy has been particularly attentive to revive and extend those commercial relations of Egypt with the surrounding countries, which once rendered it the richest and most flourishing territory in the ancient world.

A well chosen library of the best European books on the art military, geography, astronomy, medicine, history, belles-lettres and the fine arts has been purchased from Europe by the Viceroy and placed in the palace of Ismael Pasha, where is also a school, at the Viceroy's expense, for the instruction of the Mussulman youth in the Italian language and the sciences of the Franks. To which establishments has been lately added a printing press, for printing books in the Turkish, Arabic and Persian languages, and a weekly newspaper in Arabic and Italian. The library and the press are under the superintendence of Osman Nouredin Effendi, a young Turk of great good sense, and who is well versed in the literature of Europe, where he has resided for several years, by order of the Viceroy, for his education: he is at present engaged in translating into Turkish some works on tactics, for the use of his countrymen.

For several years past the inland commerce of this favored land had suffered great interruptions from the confusion and discord to which the countries on the Upper Nile have been a prey. The chiefs of Shageia had formed themselves into a singular aristocracy of brigands, and pillaged all the provinces and caravans within their reach, without mercy and without restraint; while the civil wars, which have distracted the once powerful kingdom of Sennaar for these last eighteen years, had occasioned an almost entire cessation of a commerce, from which Egypt had derived great advantages.

His Highness the Viceroy, in consequence, determined, as the most effectual means of putting an end to these disorders, to subject those countries to his dominion.

Four thousand troops were accordingly put under the command of Ismael Pasha, the youngest son of the Viceroy, with orders to conquer all the provinces on the Nile, from the Second Cataract to Sennaar inclusive.

Through the influence of the recommendation of Henry Salt, Esq., His Britannic Majesty's Consul General in Egypt, I was ordered by the Viceroy to accompany this expedition, with the rank of Topgi Bashi, i.e. a chief of artillery, and with directions to propose such plans of operation to the Pasha Ismael as I should deem expedient, but which the Pasha might adopt or reject as he should think proper.

This expedition has been perfectly successful; and the conquest of the extensive and fertile countries, which, in the reign of Candace, repulsed the formidable legions of Rome, has been effected at an expense not greater than the blood of about two hundred soldiers.

The principal cause of a success so extraordinary, at such a price, has been the humanity and good faith of the Pasha Ismael towards those provinces that submitted without fighting. Perfect security of person and property was assured to the peaceable, and severe examples were made of those few of the soldiery, who, in a very few instances, presumed to violate it. The good consequences of this deportment toward the people of these countries have been evident. All have seen that those who have preferred peace before war have had peace without war, and that those who preferred war before peace have not had peace but at the price of ruin.

The destruction or disarmament of the brigands, who have heretofore pillaged those countries with impunity – the establishment of order and tranquility – the security now assured to the peasants and the caravans – and the annexment of so many fine provinces and kingdoms to the sway of the Viceroy of Egypt,² are not the only consequences of this expedition that will give him glory.

This expedition has laid open to the researches of the geographer and the antiquarian a river and a country highly interesting, and hitherto imperfectly known to the civilized world. The Nile, on whose banks we have marched for so many hundred miles, is the most famous river in the world, for the uncertainty of its source and the obscurity of its course. At present this obscurity ceases to exist,

and before the return of the Pasha Ismael this uncertainty will probably be no more. The countries we have traversed are renowned in history and poetry as the land of ancient and famous nations, which have established and overthrown mighty empires, and have originated the religions, the learning, the arts, and the civilization of nations long since extinct; and who have been preceded by their instructors in the common road which every thing human must travel.

This famous land of Cush and Saba, at present overawed by the camps of the Osmanii, has presented to our observation many memorials of the power and splendor of its ancient masters. The remains of cities once populous—ruined temples once magnificent—colossal statues of idols once adored, but now prostrated by the strong arms of time and truth—and more than a hundred pyramids, which entomb the bodies of kings and conquerors once mighty, but whose memory has perished, have suspended for awhile the march of our troops—have attracted the notice of the Franks, who voyage with the army with the favor and the protection of the Pasha,³ and which doubtless ere long, by engaging the attention and researches of men of learning, will unite the names of Mehemmed Ali and Ismael his son with the history and monuments of this once famous and long secluded land, in a manner that will make the memory of both renowned and inseparable.

That the further progress of the Pasha Ismael southward of his present position will be successful, there is every reason to believe; and I derive great pleasure from the reflection, that his success will still further augment the glory of the man whom the Sultan delights to honor, and who has done so much for the honor of the Mussulmans.

The Reader will find that I have sometimes, in the course of this Journal, included the events of several days in the form of narrative, particularly in my account of the Second Cataract. Wherever I have so done, it has been occasioned by paroxysms of a severe ophthalmia, which afflicted me for fifteen months, and rendered me at times incapable of writing.

A NARRATIVE

&c. &c. &c.

I arrived at the camp at Wady Haifa on the Second Cataract, on the 16th of the moon Zilhadge, in the year of the Hegira 3255,4 where I found about four thousand troops,5 consisting of Turkish cavalry, infantry and artillery, and a considerable proportion of Bedouin cavalry and Mogrebin foot soldiers, besides about one hundred and twenty large boats loaded with provisions and ammunition, and destined to follow the march of the army to the upper countries of the Nile.

17th of Zilhadge. Presented myself to his Excellency the Pasha Ismael, by whom I was received in a very nattering manner, and presented with a suit of his own habiliments.

On my asking his Excellency if he had any orders for me, he replied, that he was at present solely occupied in expediting the loading and forwarding the boats carrying the provisions of the army, but that when that was finished he would send for me to receive his commands.

I employed this interval in noticing the assemblage that composed the army. The chiefs and soldiers I found well disposed to do their duty, through attachment to their young commander and through fear of Mehemmed Ali. They were alert to execute what orders they received, and very busy in smoking their pipes when they had nothing else to do.

On the 19th I was sent for by the Pasha, with whom I remained in private audience for an hour.

On the 21st of the moon Zilhadge was attacked by that distressing malady the ophthalmia. In two days the progress of the disorder was such that my eyes were closed up and incapable of supporting the light, and occasioned me such acute anguish that I could get no sleep but by the effect of laudanum. This misfortune at this crisis was peculiarly vexatious and mortifying for me, as it put it out of my power to accompany the Pasha, who departed with the army for

Dongola on the 26th, taking his route on the west bank of the river, and leaving the Divan Effendi and a small party of soldiers to expedite the loading and forwarding the boats that had not as yet got ready to proceed up the Cataract.

On the 3d of Mofiarram, A. H. 1236, I embarked on board the boat of the Frank surgeons attached to the army, and left the lower or north end of the Second Cataract as it is commonly styled in the maps, in company with fifteen boats to follow and rejoin the army.

I would here observe that what is called the Second Cataract is properly a succession of partial falls and swift rapids for more than a hundred miles before we arrived at Succoot. I counted nine; some of them, particularly the second,⁶ fifth,⁷ seventh,⁸ and ninth,⁹ very dangerous to pass, though at this time the Nile had fallen but a few feet. Before we arrived at the fifth, two boats were wrecked against the rocks which crowd the rapids, and one filled and sunk; and before we had passed the ninth several similar accidents had taken place. To pass the fifth and ninth rapids, it was necessary to employ about a hundred men to drag the boats one after another against the current. At the fifth pass, several of the boats were damaged, and two soldiers and two boatmen drowned. At this pass, the river is interrupted by a ledge of rocks reaching nearly across, and over which the Nile falls. Between this ledge of rocks and the western shore of the river is a practicable passage, wide enough to admit a boat to be hauled up the current, which here runs furiously. Overlooking this passage are two hills, one on the east and one on the west side of the river: on these hills are the ruins of ancient fortifications. They are also surmounted by two small temples in the Egyptian style: that on the west side is almost perfect. It is sculptured exteriorly and interiorly with figures and hieroglyphics, and the ceiling is painted azure.¹⁰

The appearance of the country on each side of the falls is similar to that of the country south of Assuan—a sandy desert studded with rocky hills and mountains, The only appearance of vegetation observable was in some of the islands and on the immediate banks of the river, where we met at every mile or two with small spots of fertile ground, some of them cultivated and inhabited. The rocky hills consist frequently of beautiful black granite, of the color and

brilliancy of the best sea-coal. Here and there, at different points on the Cataract, I observed some forts built by the natives of the country. They are constructed of unhewn stones cemented with mud, and flanked by towers and angular projections something resembling bastions, and are pierced with loopholes for musquetry. Their interior presents the following appearance:—against the interior side of the walls all round are built low chambers, communicating by small doors with the area and frequently with each other. I could observe nothing in these chambers except the bottom part of the small handmills used by the Orientals to grind meal, which could not be hastily removed as they were fixed in the ground; every thing else the inhabitants had carried off on the approach of the army. The great area in the centre of these forts appeared to have been occupied by the camels and flocks of the inhabitants; some of these forts are to be seen surmounting the high rocky islands with which the Second Cataract abounds, and make a picturesque appearance.

On the 2d of the moon Safa, we passed what our Rais erroneously told us was the last rapid between us and Succoot. We have been thirty days in getting thus far,¹¹ the causes of our having been so long in getting up the Falls were several. The crews of the boats which had passed unhurt a dangerous passage were frequently detained to unload and repair those which had been wrecked or damaged.—We have been detained at the entrances of these rapids frequently for several days, for want of a sufficient wind, it being absolutely necessary that the wind should be very strong to enable the boats to force themselves through currents running between the rocks with dreadful rapidity; and more than once the boatmen have hesitated to attempt a dangerous pass till obliged by the presence and menaces of the Divan Effendi who accompanied the boats.

On the 3d of Safa, about an hour after we had passed what our Rais told us was the last rapid of consequence we should have to encounter, we saw the wreck of a boat lying against a rock in the middle of the river, her masts alone appearing out of the water. The river here is interrupted by several high insulated rocks. We had been assured that we should now find the river open and without difficulty, till we should come to Succoot; the appearance of this boat seemed to contradict this representation, and in about an hour

after we had abundant reason to be satisfied that it was false. I was congratulating myself that we had got into smooth water, and indulging myself with a tranquil pipe of tobacco, when suddenly the wind slackened just as we were passing between two ledges of rocks where the river was running at the rate of about six knots an hour. The current overpowered the effort of the sails, and carried the boat directly among the reefs, near the west bank of the river. After remaining for about ten minutes in a very perilous position, the skill of our Rais happily got the boat to shore without injury.

3d of Safa. We remained all night at the place where we landed; in the morning got under sail to pass the strong current we had attempted yesterday without success. After buffeting about for an hour we were forced to return to the bank of the river, and await a stronger wind. In about an hour after the wind freshened and we got under way with better fortune, and after passing the current before mentioned found ourselves in smooth water. After sailing for an hour we stopped for ten minutes at a place where we saw sheep, in order to purchase some, having for the last twenty days been obliged to live on bread, rice, and lentils. Succeeded in purchasing two lambs. The banks of the river hereabouts present some fertile spots, a few of them cultivated. About noon the wind fell and the Rais put to shore; we immediately set our domestics about preparing the purchased meat, and shortly after we sat down to this regale, which appeared to me the most delicious meal I had eaten for many years.¹² Remained here for the remainder of the day.

4th of Safa. Continued in the same place, there not being sufficient wind to ascend the river. About two hours after noon arrived an Arab from above; he was on his way to the Divan Effendi, who was a few miles below us, to inform him that a boat, of which he had been one of the crew, had been dashed to pieces against the rocks in attempting to pass a rapid. I demanded of him "how many rapids there were yet ahead;" he replied "that there were several; how many he did not exactly know." This intelligence made me apprehensive that we might be another month in getting through these obstacles, and determined me to renew my efforts to obtain camels and proceed to the Pasha by land. I had made several attempts to hire some for this purpose, during the last fifteen days, without success. The man above mentioned informed me that I

could probably obtain some at a village about six hours off. I determined to send my servants on the morrow to inquire.

5th of Safa. Passed the night at the same place; early in, the morning a favorable breeze sprung up and the Rais got the boat under sail. Was obliged, in consequence, to proceed in the boat as long as the wind held. Observed as we proceeded a number of fertile spots, some of them cultivated, and a few small villages. I was informed that these will become more frequent as we proceed. During this day, with a favorable wind, made only about twelve miles against the current.

6th of Safa. Got under way about two hours after sunrise, with a strong breeze from the northward. About half an hour after quitting the land, passed a dangerous rapid, occasioned by a reef of rocks reaching nearly across the river. In passing this rapid the wind slackened for half a minute, and the current carried the boat astern to within six or seven feet of the rocks; at this critical instant the wind happily freshened, and forced the boat up the current, to the great relief of all on board. An hour after, passed a picturesque spot, where the river is divided by a high rocky island, supporting on its summit some ruined fortifications made by the natives; on the right bank of the river, just opposite, is a fertile spot of ground and a village, surrounded by date trees and plantations.

Our Rais put to land about noon, the wind falling, and rocks and rapids of formidable appearance being right ahead.¹³ We have made about eight miles to-day. Saw about two miles above us a number of boats lying to the shore, apparently obstructed by the rapid just mentioned. About the middle of the afternoon, in walking along the shore, saw a crocodile; it was small, about three feet in length. When I came upon him, he was sunning himself on the shore; on seeing me, he ran with great rapidity and plunged into the river.

7th of Safa. Got under way about two hours after sunrise, to pass the rocks and rapids already mentioned. The passage was dangerous, and the boat thrice in imminent peril. We struck once on rocks under water, where the current was running probably at the rate of six knots an hour.

The current, after about ten minutes, swept the boat off without having received a hole in her bottom, otherwise we must probably have perished. Shortly after we were jammed between a great shallow whirlpool and a large boat on our starboard beam. This boat was dashed by the current against ours, and menaced to shove her into the whirlpool. The long lateen yards of the two boats got entangled, and I was prepared to leap into the other boat, in anticipation of the destruction of ours, when the wind freshened, and the large boat was enabled to get clear of ours. Not long after, the same boat fell aboard of us the second time, in a place where, if our boat had drifted twice her length to leeward or astern, she must have run upon rocks. All these accidents befell us, having under our eyes, at no great distance from us, the wreck of a boat lost in this passage three or four days ago.¹⁴ After being for about two hours in danger, the boat arrived at the west bank of the river, where we found many more waiting a sufficient wind to be enabled to clear the remainder of the rapid, which runs very strong here.

Stayed for a wind at this place two days. On the 10th of Safa, the boat happily passed the remainder of the rapid, when the wind calmed, and the Rais put to shore, there being yet a strong current to surmount. Opposite to the place where we were, at about half a mile from the shore, a boat had stuck fast upon some rocks this morning, all attempts to get her off had proved unsuccessful, and she remained in that position, with all her company on board, till next morning.

11th of Safa. Quitted the shore about an hour after sunrise, with a fine northerly wind. Passed the boat just mentioned, whose people looked very forlorn. Some small boats were then on the way to unload this boat, should it be found impossible to disengage her. Proceeded on our way, and passed a number of small but pretty islands, lying near the west bank of the river. They are cultivated and inhabited by a considerable population. The country on the borders of the river begins to assume a better appearance—the territory of Succoot, which we were now entering, containing many villages. Beyond the green banks of the river, all is yellow desert, spotted with brown rocky mountains, which, however, appeared to decrease in number and height as we advanced up the river, till the country subsided into a plain, with a few isolated mountains of

singular forms and picturesque appearance here and there in view. About two hours after mid-day we arrived at a place where the river is embarrassed by small rocks and shoals, except a narrow pass on the western side. We found the current here too strong to be surmounted by the aid of what wind we had, and therefore put to shore on a very fine island on our left. We passed the remainder of the day here with satisfaction. This island is about a mile and a half in length, naturally beautiful, and well cultivated by about fifty or sixty inhabitants, who seemed to be well contented with their situation.¹⁵ We saw here three men of about twenty-five years of age, who had been circumcised but five days past, a thing I had never before known to have occurred to the children of Mussulmans.

12th of Safa. At an early hour, quitted the shore with a strong northerly wind, to pass the current which had stopped us yesterday. This day's sail was the most agreeable of any we had enjoyed since we left Egypt, the river, since we had passed the rapids of Dall, (where the second cataract of the Nile properly commences,) having become as broad as in Egypt, and now flowing tranquilly through a country equally fertile, and much more picturesque than the finest parts of Said. The eastern bank of the river, particularly, presented a continual succession of villages, and fine soil crowded with trees, and all cultivated. Passed, during the day, some fine and large islands, also occupied by numerous villages. We stopped at night at one of these islands, by whose beautiful borders we had been sailing with great pleasure for more than four hours, with a stiff breeze. We were informed by the inhabitants, that this island was a day's walk in breadth. They said, that, as we advanced, we should find others as large and larger. Their island, they told us, was called Syee. They appeared to be well satisfied with their condition, having an abundance of every thing absolutely needful for a comfortable subsistence, and decent clothing of their own manufacture. What surprised me not a little, was to find the people as white as the Arabs of Lower Egypt, whereas the inhabitants of Nubia are quite black, though their features are not those of the Negro.

I have observed, that the country through which we passed to-day, was as fertile and much more picturesque than the Said. The reason for the latter part of this assertion is, that in the Said the view is limited by the ridges of barren and calcined mountains that

bound it on both sides, whereas here the view ranges over plains bounded only by the horizon, and interspersed here and there with isolated mountains of most singular forms. Some of them might be mistaken for pyramids, they are so regular and well defined; some resembled lofty cones, and others resembled lofty square or pentagonal redoubts. One of the latter description lies upon the eastern bank of the river, and could easily be made an impregnable fortress, which could command all water communication between Egypt and Dongola. The scenes of verdure and cultivation through which we had passed today, removed all suspicions from my mind as to what had been reported to me of the great difference between Nubia and the country beyond it.

All the villages we have passed to-day, have in their centre a fort or castle, fortified with towers at the corners, and, judging from those we visited, resembling in their interior those on the cataract already described. The village, consisting of low huts, built of mud, is built round the walls of the fort, which is intended to serve as a place of retreat and defense for the inhabitants and their flocks, in case of alarm or attack. They are governed in the manner of the families of the patriarchs, the Sheck of the village being both judge and captain. Saw at this island a small skiff, the first boat belonging to the inhabitants of the country that I have seen since quitting Wady Halfa.

12th of Safa, Parted from the land about an hour after sunrise and proceeded on our voyage, which was, if possible, still more agreeable than that of yesterday. On the east bank of the river, the eye rests on a continued succession of villages, occupying land of the finest quality, and lying under a continued forest of palm trees, larger and taller, in my opinion, than those growing in Egypt. On the right we saw, as we passed, a chain of beautiful islands, some of them large and presenting the same spectacle as the east bank. It is certainly a beautiful country. The river from Assuan has only about half the breadth that it has in Egypt. In this country it is as broad, and in many places, on account of the large islands it here contains, very much broader than it is in Egypt. We stopped at night at one of these fine islands, whose breadth being but about two miles, enabled us to have a view of the west bank of the river, which presented the same succession of villages and cultivation as on the oriental