Chapter III

Farther into Africa Than Anyone Else

The Galla, a very populous tribe whose habitations stretch from lat. 8° or 7° N. to the equator (or perhaps beyond it), frequently threaten Abyssinia itself, having only recently conquered a part of it and kept it under their control for a few years. The Galla are not much different from other negro tribes; if the Sphinx be a negro type, most likely he is a Galla. Trading Arab tribes, however, wandering all over Africa, brought their traditions here too, having improved the physical aspect of people and taught some of them the original Prophet’s prayer. There the education of the Galla ends—except, perhaps, for the art of the smelting of iron ore, which does, of course, require a certain degree of enlightenment. At the Fadasi market, which now belongs to Abyssinia (see map), people gather from all parts of Inner Africa, but the Galla prevail there. They bring horses, honey, iron shaped as short blocks, and spears, so very ubiquitous, although I cannot tell if they make those spears themselves or obtain them from negroes living on the other side of the equator.

The Galla negroes eat raw meat, which has given some an excuse to say—quite wrongly—that they are anthropophagous! The Makadi and
Sphinx situated near pyramids

many other tribes living on the confines of the Sudan and in Abyssinia are more civilized, yet they eat raw meat. In Europe raw meat is also believed in some cases to be more wholesome that fried meat, raw ham being preferred to boiled ham. The Makadi and the Galla have learned this hygienic truth sooner. Indeed, they enjoy perfect health and live longer than other negroes, even though the farthest-living of them are under the equator. Ultimately, such is their taste, and that is the end of
it! . . . Thus at feasts, freshly slaughtered bulls, their blood still steaming, are hung upon a pole among the guests, and everyone cuts off a piece for themselves according to their taste.

The Galla live in tukkels, which form villages; dressed not much better than the rest, they are distinguished from other tribes in the battle only by large ivory rings worn above elbows, as well as sheep-skins, or sometimes leopard-skins, thrown over shoulders, hair out; they are armed as everyone else, but while few other negroes in these parts have shields, almost all the Galla do have them, although those are mostly of elephant-hide rather than hippopotamus-hide. What, then, is their advantage over other negroes? Firstly, it is their large number; secondly, their united force. In wartime, they select a commander amongst themselves, who rides in front on a mule, his men obeying him unconditionally; meanwhile, it is during this time that outrages occur in these mountains. Taking advantage of the Galla’s incursions into Kamamil, not only do the tribes subjugated by Kamamil provide no assistance to it, but they also rebel against it while neighboring tribes stab it in the back to avenge their latest grievances, until eventually their own turn comes. Thus the Galla have recently reached Benishangul with almost no resistance, having covered 600 or 700 versts\(^1\) in their campaign—and in a short time at that, for they had to hasten back home with all their speed, aware of the danger of the kharif approaching. They commence their expedition at the beginning of the rashash, a period of moderate rains in early April, usually marching along the Toumat, for water in these parts is the main condition on which any free action is possible—the condition of success and life. They fly like a storm-cloud, yet rumors travel everywhere faster than themselves. They do not bother their neighbors, the negroes of the Berta tribe, including the inhabitants of Shumba and other mountains; whether it be because the latter are their vassals or for some other reason, I do not know; yet even the neighbors tend to tremble during the campaign, no-one hoping for long-lasting peace and many getting out of the way as a precaution. Terrible fluster ensues, as if in an ant-hill: they run from one mountain to another, they ask for help, arm themselves, and kill

\(1\) Between 400 and 500 miles.
each other at incessant meets; a horn never stops summoning people from all points, the lights burning all night through, on every moun-
tain. The mek of Kamamil gives the mek of Benishangul his daughter, he sends gold to Fasdur, and so he is promised help . . . but here come the Galla, they are already on the mountain . . . and everyone perishes or is taken into slavery, far away from their native mountains to the land of a people whom other negroes believe to be cannibals. To kill a Galla is a heroic deed, a celebratory occasion here; his corpse is cut into hundreds of pieces, which are carried round the country as if they were trophies and displayed for all to see.

From the Disah we descended straight to the Toumat. No Egyptian had ever been here, to say nothing of Europeans; the army of Moham-
med Ali had never penetrated here; the guides from Benishangul did not know the way forward; but we no longer needed them, for the Tou-
mat was to conduct us further on. No-one could even tell how far up the Toumat we were from Kamamil and whether we would be able to proceed with the camels; I halted and made a camp, sending a cavalry detachment to search for a route, having already decided to proceed along the river-bed itself.

Search for gold had usually been conducted here in accordance with the instructions of guides, in those places where negroes had previously worked and where, of course, more gold had been found. It would be forgivable if the authorities did that, for they know no other means; but Europeans, too, did the same. Of course it ended with the guides doing their utmost to deflect the searchers from rich deposits rather than conducting them there, for it was those deposits that constituted the source of wealth that the Turks wished to extort from them. That was one of the many reasons why—despite Mohammed Ali’s efforts of 20 years past, as well as immense costs—gold still had not been discov-
ered in the Sudan. I say that from experience: no sooner had we aban-
donned the guides, no sooner had we followed our own considerations, than we found on the Toumat a significant deposit containing gold, near which we proposed to establish another gold-washing factory.

This point was also of military importance, for it was here that the Galla usually ventured out to launch their devastating incursions into
the territory of the Berta. An encampment and a garrison, required to protect the factory, would also protect the new subjects of Mohammed Ali from total extermination; and the settlement, connected with the first factory and the already established encampment, would be included in a line of military settlements in the mountains along the Toumat, a project I had submitted to the Viceroy.

In the evening the detachment that I had dispatched to explore the route returned and announced that in many places, the Toumat was blocked up by rocks across its entire width, and that even horses (let alone camels) were occasionally unable to walk over them. “Can we still walk it?” I asked. “We can!” “Well then, we shall walk.”

Having left the caravan in a fortified place, under the protection of 300 people, and having instructed them to explore the gold-mine I had discovered, we set forth. The soldiers carried a supply of dourra sufficient for six days or so, the other provisions having been loaded on donkeys, of which there happened to be about 40 in the detachment.

The Toumat is beautiful here, lying in the shade of the bright-green foliage of negro lemon-trees and wild laurel-trees. With giant rocks piled up everywhere, the river must be magnificent when in full flow; the rocks are so high that the waves do not drown them but tear and rush through them with a deafening roar, according to eye-witness accounts. Asclepias lanifora, very similar to the jasmine in color and smell, was sweeping over us with its branches from the bank. It is very common here; being completely devoid of leafage and covered with flowers and fruit all over, the plant is extremely beautiful.

A six or seven hours’ crossing over sand and rocks, and sometimes over water—for instance, by the mouth of the Sorgol, which never dries out—with heavy burdens and under the white-hot skies, was arduous for the soldiers; in addition, the guides, doing all they could to deflect us from this route, had told them frightening stories of terrible dangers; yet my little black soldiers marched briskly and cheerfully, as though nothing was the matter. An army better able to bear all the labors and hardship of a march would not be easy to find. To go without food for a day or two, or without water for a whole day, is no trouble to the negro. Also, the negro does not concern himself with his choice
of viands, always being able to find some potatoes, onions, or edible roots, or even gongoles (the fruit of the baobab), and requiring nothing more; thirst poses the only mortal danger for him in this extraordinary country where for six months one cannot find any respite from water, entire masses of it falling from the sky, while for the next six months there is not a drop of water to be obtained. If these soldiers had good officers, they would be good soldiers in all respects; but the officers are not worth a curse, being illiterate, timid, and avaricious. Their only advantage is their skin-color, which the blacks customarily respect from an early age, recognizing the lawful nature of their own denigration.

Along our route, where the banks were high and hung over the dry river-bed, we could see pits which, protruding far into the banks, were filled with water and seemed deep. They had been dug by negroes, who search for crocodiles under the thin layer of sand, where there are deeper cavities providing permanent shelter to the amphibious creatures until the Toumat is inundated. The negroes know that a crocodile, when confined in a tight space, is not very dangerous, and they kill it with lances alone, predominantly stabbing it in the wide-open mouth or under one of the front legs. This place is occasionally reached by negroes from very remote parts! What attracts them is not the crocodile-hunting alone, but especially the washing of golden sands.

Riding with a vanguard group, I had just passed a pile of stones without noticing anything, when suddenly loud cries behind us made me return. What was the matter? A negro—bewildered, frightened, with a vacuous countenance, and naked, of course—stood there surrounded by the soldiers, many of whom were claiming their right to him, some being the first to have noticed him, others to have caught him. With great difficulty I managed to pacify the crowd and make them explain the matter: it turned out that the wretched man, upon seeing the vanguard group, leapt into a space between rocks and buried himself in the sand. Yet negroes can scent their game from afar, and so they extracted him from under the ground. Some signs betokening that he was from Fandango, they found a soldier who could understand his language (in these parts nearly every mountain has a distinct language); I tried to ask the captive about the route and nearby tribes, but it was all in vain:
he stood before me like a madman! Bored with the interview, I told
the soldiers that Fandango obeyed, if only ostensibly, Mohammed Ali,
and we therefore were not to take prisoners amongst its people under
any circumstances; in addition, our object was something other than
negro-hunting—whereupon they let the poor man go. Another time we
encountered several negroes; there were five of them or so; had they
rushed sideward, onto a bank overgrown with a thicket of trees and
shrubs, no-one would even think of chasing them; yet the frightened
negroes, like the wild chamois I have written about, ran ahead in front
of us, along the river. They were, of course, caught and, after various
interrogations, also set free. They themselves found such magnanimity
incomprehensible; they thought that we were about to fire a volley at
them, if only to amuse ourselves, and so they hesitated awhile, unable
to decide whether they should go, and then rushed forward, like an
arrow launched from a bow. One negro surprised me. No sooner had
they caught him than our Arab guide, having peered at him good and
proper, cried that the man was a slave that he had bought some 20
years ago from jellabs and claimed his rights to him. We had no time to hold
court and dispense punishment in such matters, and therefore, turn-
ing to the negro, I announced that he was now free to go wherever he
wished; yet the negro, to my great surprise, followed his former master,
and an hour later, I saw him again, now loaded, like an ass, with his
master’s possessions. A sense of abjection, duty, and respect toward the
right of power that others have over them is perpetually manifested in
the negroes; those feelings, inexplicable and instinctive, reduce them
to a most miserable condition.

A two days’ march from Kamamil we reached a fork, where one
river, known as the Degessi, bent south-west, while the other, the
Toumat proper, took us straight down south. The town of Fadasi, con-
stituting the market of Inner Africa, lay not far off on our left, on the
frontier between Abyssinia and the Galla land. From thence the bed
of the Toumat diminishes in width visibly until it finally becomes a
low ravine, at the bottom of which flows a narrow stream of the river’s
sources, and that only during the rainy season. There we halted, there

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2 The Didessa River, in present-day Ethiopia.
being nothing more to search for, our aim having been achieved! My negro soldiers rejoiced, having penetrated the land of the Galla as an open force, and they talked amongst themselves, saying that no-one would believe them in Khartoum when they began telling people about the place they had been to. We were still to reach a mound ahead of us: from thence one could observe the entire surrounding country, casting one’s eye over a place that so many travelers had attempted to reach, all in vain, many of them having paid with their lives for their unreserved commitment to science. I took with me about 20 soldiers, as well as several negroes and Arabs who knew the area and would be able to explain to me at least something about the blue mountains in the distance; we reached the mound about two hours ere sunset. I looked round cheerfully and proudly. No-one had ever got as far into Africa as we did from this side, which was the most forbidding to travelers. This victory over nature, this primacy of man’s conquest of it are not without a certain pleasure; a lofty pleasure that can be experienced only by a traveler who reaches his destination, having endured a series of hard labors, hardships, and trials of his patience and will-power.

Around me, and mostly to the left, there lay a land that had been inhabited 12 years ago or so and was now completely deserted, having lost its very name; the native negroes had been exterminated or taken into slavery by the Galla tribe. This land shall, of course, remain deserted for long, for it constitutes a raised plateau, providing no protection from enemies. It has now been taken over by elephants, which are extremely numerous here, one of our men having seen an entire herd amounting, by his count, to 130 elephants; they roam free here; the inhabitants of these lands, unlike the negroes of the White Nile, do not know how to hunt them; true, there is no water on the surface here, yet the elephant has found a way to obtain it: lying on the bottom of the Toumat, it wallows there until the sand gives way to its weight, whereupon it rises, water appearing in the created pit, in which it remains for several days.

I named this place the Land of Nicholas; a small river (which in the current season was, of course, completely dry) ran across it, a river whose name had been lost, and so I named it the Nevka on my map,
which name would point to a European traveler’s having reached this place and indicate his nationality.

Further to the east, nearly in the same latitude as we were and even slightly behind us, there lay the town of Fadasi, which we could not see behind a nearby hill, and beyond it rose the giant mountains of Abyssinia. To the west, amongst a variety of mountains, two peaks, Radokah and Fadokah, stood the highest of all; the mountains stretching from them southward and northward.

Down the Toumat, the eye could reach the horizon, scarcely covered with small hills, with thickets and undergrowth in abundance. Yet my thoughts and my eyes were drawn south, to the sources of the White Nile, of which no-one had told me anything yet, despite all my queries.

In the distance loomed blue mountains, which are usually denominated on all the maps as the Moon Mountains, Jebel-el-Khamar, an Arabic rather than a native name, as you can see; as to how it managed to reach these parts, geographers could tell you that. Even here, on the northern side of the mountain-face, where the mountains are most likely to be known by an Arabic name, they are called Souri. At their foot-hills, according to an assumption made by the D’Abbadie brothers, the White Nile, or the Nile proper, should flow, having apparently been diverted south along the mountain range and then forced to make its way through its masses, directly to the west. Yet that is physically impossible; the northern side of the mountain-face gives origin to rivers that flow directly to the north, such as the Yabous, for instance, and even the Toumat itself, which, were the White Nile indeed here, would be bound to meet it along the way and merge with it, while in reality, having run a long distance north, these rivers safely reach their destination—that is, flow into the Blue Nile. Thus if the river discovered by the D’Abbadies does constitute the sources of the Nile, then it should make an abrupt bend, applying extraordinary efforts at its very birth, so to speak, prior to strengthening and enriching itself with extraneous waters so as to be able to tear through the mountains, which, at this bend, would press on it from every direction, in Abyssinia and in the Galla land, in the latitude given by the D’Abbadies. If, on the other hand, one assumes that it

3 Jabal al-Qamar.
flows on the other side of the mountains, south of them, and makes its way north after it has circumvented them, then it would be bound to encounter along the way the Gokhob or the Omo, rivers that have been well mapped by Major Harris, and consequently, to flow into them and disappear in the southern direction.

I shall not make so bold as to categorically refute the important—nay, great—discovery made by the D'Abbadies, and yet, having nearly reached the latitude of 8° without finding Bahr-el-Abiad (that is, the Nile proper) nor even hearing of it from any of the natives, while also bearing in mind the above considerations, I now have more than enough reason to doubt the supposed discovery. By the bye, this is what many negroes said, their words being confirmed by those of one of my Arab companions, who used to be a high-ranking official in the time of the former Sennaar rulers—a man who had visited Abyssinia and knew his country, which stretched far south, very well. In the latitude given by D'Abbadie, perhaps subject to a slight variation, there is, indeed, a Bahr-el-Abiad, but that is a small river flowing into the Blue Nile, on your right if you face downstream; it is, however, shown on a map compiled by Caillaud and printed in Paris in 1827; there is also, a little way to the south, a small lake known as Bahr-el-Abiad.

Did D'Abbadie mistake the sources of that river or the lake for the Nile itself?

I repeat: I have cited my considerations and my doubts here, although I hesitate to refute the discovery made by D'Abbadie, a courageous and respectable traveler, as we have heard. However, we shall return to this question, which excited so heated an argument between Ayrton, who defended D'Abbadie, and Beke, who refuted his reasons, the latter being subsequently attacked by Werne too.4

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4 Frederick Ayrton (1812–73), British traveler and explorer of Africa; Charles Tilstone Beke (1800–1874), British geographer, traveler, and biblical scholar; and Ferdinand Werne (1800–74), German scholar, diplomat and explorer. The polemics around the D'Abbadie brothers’ discovery of the source of the White Nile occurred in the pages of the *Journal of the Royal Geographic Society of London* in 1848–50.