Yet another white horse with a bell round its neck and a swarthy, human-like creature on its back; once again, camels roaring, a kibosh cracking, people crying and shouting in all languages; this time, however, loud laughter and jokes, more or less amusing, enlivened the preparations and commotion that had previously taken place under a burden of general gloom and harsh severity. It all augured something new, something good now . . . We were setting off on our return journey! . . .

The Turks who accompanied us were especially glad: they expressed their content in a child-like, unconscious manner, talking with affection to our foremen, despite their being able to understand one another very little. The foremen were no less glad, yet retained the serious demeanor of officials; only occasionally could one hear a witticism addressed to an Arab guide or to a camel, such as this: “My dear fellow, would you please move your hump at least a little lower—I might as well be sitting on an awl.” Yet the jolly and happy crowd contained two people who looked with sadness upon all the preparations. Having been revived by European life, they now faced the same old dull, dark sequence of
days that brought them one insult upon another, one humiliation upon another . . . We had delivered them temporarily from their plight, but now they were about to be abandoned to their fate: a mire of ignorance and superstition opened up before them, yawning ever wider, threatening to drown them. Well, they will accustom themselves to it again! There is nothing man cannot become accustomed to!

I went to bid farewell to the nearby mountains and mountain valleys, where I had halted so often, exhausted with the heat and fatigue. Stark and scorched by the sun only recently, they were now, following a week of torrential rain during which I had not seen them, covered with bright greenery and with myriads of marvelous lilies and irises. Life had sprung up everywhere, appearing from cracks in the dried-out ground, from caves, and between rocks; while only a very short time ago, there was death here! Now a variety of insects and birds filled the air with their cries, songs, and tweets; occasionally some large animal would run past: a wild buffalo or an antelope, fleeing the advancing seasonal rains. If even animals fled them, we had no hope of remaining here!

I hastened to return to our camp. The entire detachment and the Governor-General were waiting for me. I must admit that I jumped upon my horse cheerfully and set off, accompanied by the entire population of Khassan, white and black alike. After half an hour we halted and, following a long exchange of mutual assurances of eternal friendship and fervent love, bade farewell to the Governor-General; I also bade farewell to those of the soldiers who were returning to Khassan, to all those with whom I had grown intimate in a short time, those who had served me loyally and, perhaps, loved me—a final farewell! . . . Drums rolled, and some set off south to Khassan with the Governor-General, while the others set off north with me: to the cold but dear North. The same black creature pranced on the white horse before me; but the peril ahead of us was hidden behind a dark pall; no-one could see it, and therefore we all found solace in the present, which had so rarely revealed itself to us in a brilliant light.

We spent our first halt on the Toumat. The night was beautiful. The full moon shone bright, rain drops glittering like phenacite on the
vivid foliage of negro lemon-trees. Here, too, nature had unfolded in all its equatorial beauty; the air was stifling with the smell of jasmine-trees, which covered the entire mountain valley where we had set our camp; enormous fires, lit to guard the camp from the attacks of wild beasts, played with the moonlight, as if willfully, now casting a shadow upon the marvelous scene that had unfolded before us, now shedding a bright light upon it. Exhausted with the heat and labor, we avidly inhaled the mild, moist air, our hearts light and joyful. What a magnificent mystery this forest harbors in its silence; what a picturesque image the immense stump of a baobab-tree reflects against its darkness; how variegated are the foot-hills and, even more so, the camp sprawled over them! . . . Beautiful nature! . . . My soul seemed to grow ever bigger, striving to reach its greatness! . . . One could not even think of sleep—oh no! I saw negroes who, gathered in small groups, sat there half the night, as if they, too, thought it a pity to part with such a beautiful sight.

Reader, I shall not lead you with me, day upon day, along the road back, but shall instead transport you fast, halting only seldom to observe things we have not yet seen, all the way to the place where we shall turn onto a new path, into the Lesser Nubian Desert.

On the morrow, I met a kawass accompanied by several soldiers; it was a messenger specially sent from Cairo to give me a letter and news-papers; it was then that I learned for the first time about all the upheavals in Europe. What is it? was my initial thought. A press canard, I imagine? I soon realized, however, that it was no canard but bitter truth.

On the fifth day, we reached Roseires, which constituted the last mountain terrace. We overtook the rainy season, which had not commenced in the foot-hills yet; here we parted with T., who decided to wait for the rains so as to see the local flora in its full development.

After a short repose, and having bidden farewell to T. and to our detachment, we boarded our dahabias and set off down the Nile. Another bell . . . I thought for a moment that I was about to see a white horse and a black creature, but no! The bell hung at the top of a mast, making a mournful sound when swung by the wind. The men on the dahabia began an old song:
A little bird flew from Maghrabia,
Flying all the way to Iskagaria.

There followed a couplet full of improvised gallimaufry and then the same refrain again.

We sailed fast, propelled by the current, the wind, and the effort of 12 hands, skillful and strong Barbars, but it was not to last! In a single day, out of the 26 men on the boats, not counting the rowers, 21 fell ill, all with fever or dysentery. We were forced to halt; I suffered the most; the paroxysms of gastric fever lasted for 21 or 22 hours without respite, accompanied by terrible bouts of sickness, which drew my entire in-nards out of my body.

Before me, objects of bitter reality vaguely mingled with figments of sick imagination; men on the dahabia flashing past me, now pale and exhausted, now black and with shiny eyes and teeth, seemed to have come from the other world, summoned to the Last Judgement, with the chaos of the Judgement presenting itself in all its terror. Scientific subjects mingled with images created by my imagination. The white-hot core of the earth expanded and tore through its crust, its lava flowing into the seas and oceans, making them evaporate; the air was filled with fog, in which figures appeared, now dark, now light, and my gaze always beheld one of them and attached itself to this figure, in rainbow dress and with a face so meek, lit up with prayer and full of compassion for my suffering . . . and in such moments I felt better . . .

But what do you care about my illness and my sufferings, reader! Were I to die in Africa, you would still care nothing . . . Onward and onward, you say; onward and onward, I said, too, as soon as I was capable of giving orders: it was clear that, should the rainy season stop us, we would never be able to leave these lands.

I cannot comprehend why the disease suddenly struck us all on the same day. The doctor assured me that each of us had already carried it in his breast, our constant activity preventing it from revealing itself; it was only during a three days’ complete repose on the dahabia that it grew and developed fast. Doctors are generally pretty good at explaining properties of diseases; were they equally good at curing them, there
would be no sick in the entire world. Here are the consolations they offered us with regard to the inevitable nature of local diseases.

No sooner had we arrived at Cairo than one of us, to his horror, saw that his face was covered with spots the similar of which had never been seen in Europe. He rushed to a doctor. “Very good,” the doctor said, “it means that you are beginning to take to our climate and water, your body being receptive and your skin sensitive; you should settle in.” What led the reputable doctor to console the patient with such conclusions, I know not to this day; but whatever the truth, I prefer not to take to the Egyptian climate as long as my face remains as it is rather than resembling a Turkish melon.

In the Nubian Desert another disaster struck us. We became covered with large red patches, which cast much gloom over us. To the doctor. “Good, good! It is best for all this to come out rather than to remain inside.” “For pity’s sake, our skin is now more akin to that of a leopard or a striped hyena than to human skin.” “So much the better! Let it all come out.” “But this is the effect of water which even dogs would not drink; this is caused by fatigue and the heat.” “Whatever the cause, the results are the same. Your body is purifying itself of all things bad. Excellent!”

The Nile commenced to rise—we were held to account for it, too. My body got covered with a small rash, so much so that there remained, so to speak, not a single good spot to prick with a pin. To the doctor. “Well,” he said, “there can be no doubt here; this is a law of nature: the Nile is rising.” “But it certainly is no fault of mine!” “It is only the sick who are not afflicted with such a rash; it is good that you have it—it means that you are not ill.” “For pity’s sake, how can it be good!? I feel as if my body is on fire; it itches as if being stung by myriads of insects, every scratch causing me terrible pain.” “The Nile is rising,” the doctor said in a consolatory tone. “This is a law of nature!”

Indeed, as I have said, I fell ill of fever. The first paroxysms of the local fever are horrible: it is a veritable hell inside one’s chest, and the outer heat, reaching 40 degrees Reaumur¹ in the shade, serves to greatly increase one’s sufferings. “Do you know,” the doctor said, “that

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¹ 50°C.
we have a popular belief that a fever, as it passes, makes one much healthier?" “Go to hell, Doctor!” was my reply . . .

I have no doubt that, were I to die, he would still find some advantage in it, assuming as he would that I could hear him.

As already stated, had well-meaning advice alone been able to help one in trouble, I would have never fallen ill, for I received all sorts of instructions prior to my departure from Cairo. One doctor told me several times, “In the course of your journey, you must abstain from meat and must drink no wine nor anything strong”; another insisted, “Do not alter your habits; eat and drink everything you used to eat and drink previously, and you shall remain well”; a third ordered me to eat and drink as much as possible, claiming that it was the only way to sustain the energy of the nervous system, the function of the stomach, and the perspiration of the body, as well as to protect oneself from fever. “You shall see Turks in the Sudan,” he said, “every single one of whom is healthier than Methuselah, the reason being that every single one of them drinks no less than two or three bottles of vodka daily.” I know nothing about the health of Methuselah, ancient history having only preserved the memory of his longevity for us; but that the Turks living in the Sudan do indeed drink two or three bottles daily and freely indulge in every excess without exception while enjoying great health—all that I was able to witness myself. I should note but one thing: that in the entire Sudan, including its Turkish population, you shan’t find a single old man of 60 or even 50 years of age.

Henceforth, a long chain of sufferings and illnesses never afforded me any respite all along our journey to Cairo, and when they do subside now, it is only for a short time, so as to allow me to come back to my senses before gripping me again with all the might of their claws, like a cat amusing itself with a caught mouse.

We could not even think of repose: the rains followed hard on our heels and caught up with us several times. A distant rumble of thunder constantly reminded us of the necessity to be on our guard; the sky never rid itself of clouds, driven from the south; the sun rarely appeared from behind them, which did not, however, improve our condition, for the air was stifling and the wind just as hot as ever.
Sennaar is justly notorious for the variety and rarity of its diseases; Bruce described them at length, although he was not much believed. Ismail Pasha—for whom Caillaud translated the account of this traveler, one of the first Europeans to have reached these parts—mocked him; yet he was soon to be convinced of Bruce’s veracity: out of 4,000 men who were in Sennaar with him, 3,000 went down with disease, and he himself became very ill of fever.

One cannot help mentioning a noble deed by that favorite son of Mohammed Ali. Frediani,2 an Italian poet who accompanied him in the expedition, lost his mind, afflicted by an exhausting fever and by the strong heat; such things often happen to Europeans here. Ismail Pasha appointed his own doctor to care for the patient; he constantly visited him in person; upon noticing that the unfortunate poet imagined himself to be a great man, Ismail Pasha, very content to be able to satisfy the sufferer’s vanity, gave him his own rich dress and his servants; finally, he provided the sick man with linen, despite his own need for it during a prolonged journey in these wild places.

Sennaar harbors another sad memory.

Once upon a time, there was an obscure legend in Europe, embellished with most fanciful additions, about Ivan the Priest, who reigned over some part of Ethiopia (or India, according to some);3 certain Christian rulers dispatched entire expeditions to discover this imaginary sovereign. King Louis XIV of France, in his turn, sent an embassy directly to Abyssinia, already a Christian country at that time. It was in 1703, and following many travails and adventures, the embassy finally arrived at Sennaar in 1705. It was headed by du Roule, a courageous and industrious man; the scientist Lippi4 was with him, serving as a doctor and naturalist; the others had died or fallen behind along the way. The King of Sennaar received the foreign visitors, who brought him rich gifts, very kindly, and he also gave them, in his turn, whatever he could; yet soon news came from Cairo that the visitors were dangerous people,

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2 Ermenegildo Frediani (1783–1823), Italian explorer.
3 Prester John, mythical Christian patriarch who allegedly resided in India, Central Asia, or Africa.
4 Janus de Noir du Roule (d. 1705), French diplomat; Augustin Lippi (1668–1705), French physician and botanist.
on their way to Abyssinia to teach the natives to produce gun-powder and weapons and also, most importantly, to deflect the current of the Nile to the south and thus to destroy Egypt and Sennaar. Upon hearing the news, the black King was overwhelmed with horror. The luxury in which the embassy traveled proved the most perilous thing for them, for it could not help exciting avariciousness in the nomads; it is odd that, having seen many a traveler perish under similar circumstances in remote and poor countries, their followers still fail to learn from their example.

At the end of the month of August, du Roule parted with the King, apparently on friendly terms, and set off on his way; yet no sooner had he reached a market square at the edge of the town than he was attacked by as many as 300 people, who killed him and all his entourage in a most inhumane manner and seized their possessions. Upon learning of this incident, the King of Abyssinia sent his army to Sennaar so as to avenge the demise of the embassy; but his army seemed to achieve little success in Sennaar, once famous for the bravery of its inhabitants.

I have already said that the population of Sennaar consists for the most part of negroes and then of Arabs. These last, as well as the descendants of themselves and the negroes, are divided by the natives into five categories as follows: 1. El-Asfar: these are essentially Bedouin Arabs, with smooth hair, meek expression and yellowish-red skin; it is they, it seems, who are the real descendants of the original Hejaz people, which is proven by, among other things, their pure Arabic dialect, far better than the one spoken in Egypt. 2. El-Amar, red in color, their hair curly and with a reddish hue, their eyes languid and matt: they seem to be a cross between the original inhabitants of the Sudan and foreigners. 3. El-Sudan Azrak, descendants of the Fung, the conquerors of Sennaar: the color of their skin is bronze, their hair curly. 4. El-Akdar, very similar to the Fung in hair and skin-color: these two groups seem to be one and the same people, transformed under different influences of foreigners. 5. El-Kat Fatelobem: yellow in color with a greenish hue, with either curly or smooth hair; they bear a great resemblance to the Abyssinians; like the latter, they are
somewhat inclined to the cultivation of land and seem to be related to descendants of peoples whose forebears lived in Egypt in the time of the pharaohs.

Before we leave Sennaar, let us say at least a few words about the hospitable princess of the former Sennaar Kingdom. She has to this day retained a shade of her former magnificence; her palace, if one can apply this word to a fortified group of houses, is the best dwelling in the peninsula, and even the Turkish authorities enjoy visiting her, safe in their knowledge that here they will find rum, vodka, and women! . . . Nasra, for that is her name, was once beautiful, which procured her the patronage of the beast-like Defterdar, now she is an old woman. Arbab, her husband as well as First Minister, was my permanent companion and took care of me as much as he could. When parting with me, he asked me to be sure to visit his home, and I was bound by my word; to tell you the truth, it was also my illness that forced me to go there. Nasra received me as a welcome guest. At dinner, which was rather decent, rum and vodka were served; the hostess at first took umbrage at my refusal to drink anything, but my companions appeased her, themselves reaching for the bottles with great desire and frequency, each time insisting that they drank for me, wishing to please the hostess, who would otherwise have been quite offended.

Nasra herself, too, partook of the forbidden drink from time to time. She pretended to be of Mohammedan faith, and yet, probably because the law-making Prophet had forgotten to mention women in his book, she, in her turn, thought little about the Prophet; she was, however, bitterly saddened by the loss of her greatness.

After the repast, one of her servants led me to a little house that stood apart from the rest.

Upon opening the door, I immediately closed it again, willing to return. My guide, embarrassed, assured me that it was the best house in the entire Sudan. “That may well be,” I replied, “but it is already occupied.” “How could you say that?” he cried. “They are your servants.”

I entered.

A number of women of divers colors, yellow, red, greenish, and completely black, their arms folded across their chests, their eyes cast
down, wearing traditional dress—that is, the costume worn by their
great-grand-mother Eve—stood along a wall in a servile manner. The
bed was on the opposite side; next to it was a little table upon which
stood various oils, including rose oil, in disgusting little jars. I guessed
what the matter was, yet still asked my guide, whose face and voice
were not very different from those of the unfortunate female slaves in
the room, what it was all for.

“To rub you with oil.”
“But who shall rub me?”
“They shall!”
“And what shall follow next?”
“They shall remain at your service.”
“But what can they possibly do at night?”
“They shall remain standing there all night—unless you find other
things for them to do,” he added with an arch smile.

“No! It is too much!” And with that, to the great surprise of Nasra’s
loyal servant, and perhaps to the even greater surprise of his hospitable
mistress, I told him to lead these ranks of Sennaar beauties away, refusing
the pleasure of my body being rubbed, as well as various other pleasures.

I can imagine what my fashionable Turks must have done! De-
spite the fear instilled in them by my person, they would sometimes
break out in a little song whose sounds would reach my room, sepa-
rated from other houses by a whole garden.

It was with a sad feeling that I went past the Kamlin factory. Lord,
could it be that the same future should await my factory, too!? Is it truly
the common fate of all useful enterprises in the East? The man who has
established it is gone, and the enterprise collapses! Yet I can say with
certainty that, for as long as Mohammed Ali is alive, the gold industry
will grow: there is still much to do here, and therefore the Pasha will not
abandon the business until he brings it to the desired end.

I halted at Saba once again. We went ashore and set off to the ruins,
but suddenly we stopped, struck with horror: an enormous serpent, the
similar of which I had never seen ere, crawled sinuously out of a heap
of stones a few steps away from us. It must, in its turn, have been fright-
ened by the crowd, for it quickly disappeared. Our doctor, who was the
last to come back to his senses, assured us that fear was very wholesome for us, and that henceforth there would be no slightest sign of fever among us: completely wrong! It tortured us as much as before. I had once seen a leopard very close to me and, another time, a hyena, but they had not frightened me; I had had no time to take fright, obliged to hold my gun at the ready; yet on this occasion, reader, what weapon could I possibly take up against a serpent!? . . .

Saba is the last frontier of Egyptian enlightenment—or, it would be fairer to say, the first one, for I remain convinced that Egyptian civilization was born in the South; the very ruins of Saba presenting not the decadence of an effete and exhausted taste but the infancy of the arts, a state that manifested itself in energy and immensity.

In 1846, Sheikh Zain al-Abidin, that learned man, traveling in the West, saw in Wadai, beyond Darfour, the ruins of a city which, according to his description, had belonged to the ancient Egyptians and still contained vestiges of their creed. Theretofore no-one supposed that it had been so wide-spread.

The very resemblance between the words Saba and Sheba, this last being so well-known in the biblical history, proves their identity, especially seeing that the sounds s and sh are often interchangeable in nearly all languages.

It is odd that the legend of the Queen of Sheba and Solomon, preserved in our holy books, is also recounted in the book of Mohammed (Ch. 27), albeit in the Oriental style. Mohammed says that Solomon, sitting at home, talked to the Ethiopian queen—who also remained at her own palace—quite effortlessly, as if they were in the same room.

I met many old acquaintances in Khartoum. The Rome mission was still there: Father Rillo took to bed, gravely ill; Bishop Cozzolani was making preparations to return home, bored of Khartoum, of Rillo, and of the Propaganda; other members of the spiritual mission busied themselves with building and gardening; but still all of them, taken together, had not yet converted a single pagan to Christianity; moreover, they had not yet conducted a single mass.

It was from the missionaries that I learned further news of the world upheavals; it was also here that I heard of Mohammed Ali’s illness,
although I took every precaution not to reveal the latter news to my companions or to anyone I encountered along the way: the mere name of Egypt’s reformer alone serves as a pledge of order and expedition.

The traces of the terrible Defterdar’s rule over the country, marked by destruction and desolation, have not been obliterated yet, perhaps owing to the people’s wounds being irritated from time to time; such is a custom of the Turks, who adhere to the method of bleeding both in medicine and in politics.

Horrible stories are told of the Defterdar; anecdotes about him are passed round like appalling myths, known to everyone but recounted differently by different people. In my turn, I shall tell a few of the more popular local stories, borrowing them from quite truthful narrators.

“Why is the horse limping?” the Pasha asked his sais, for the Defterdar was fond of horses. “It is someone’s evil eye,” the intimidated sais replied. The Turks think, of course, that any disaster can be caused by the casting of a spell or the evil eye, but the Defterdar must have had his doubts about that, and so he examined the horse’s hooves; and when it turned out that the horse was badly shod, the Pasha ordered to take the horse-shoes off and to have the sais shod.

Once a woman came to him to complain about a soldier who had drunk her milk without paying her. The Pasha questioned the soldier, who swore that he had not drunk the milk. Then the Defterdar announced that, if the soldier was the guilty party, he would himself pay for the milk, twice its price, and if it was the woman, he would hang her; to determine the truth he told his men to cut the soldier’s stomach open. The stomach was opened and traces of milk found in it; then the Pasha ordered them to satisfy the complainant’s debt and to throw the cut-up body of the soldier to the dogs.

A fellah in some village had not paid his taxes, and the mamur told his men to take away his cow, the last possession of the poor man, and sell it in a public market; but no-one would pay for the cow the amount owed by the fellah; then the clever mamur summoned a butcher and told him to cut the cow into pieces and sell one to each household for such a price as to obtain enough money to cover the fellah’s debt in full. While

5 A groom or stable boy.
the butcher did as he was told, the poor fellah went to the Defterdar to complain. The Pasha summoned the mamur and the executioner of his will. The butcher, trembling with fear, told everything as it was. “Why did you do that?” the Pasha asked. “The mamur ordered me.” “Will you do anything your master tells you to do?” “Anything, Effendi! Tell me to do whatever you please.” “Then cut the mamur into as many pieces as you cut the cow and take the pieces to your fellow-villagers, asking for each twice as much money as you had for the beef, and then return the obtained sum to the complainant.”

The butcher did as he was told.