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 During the Years 1817 and 1818
 Charles Leonard Irby and James Mangles
 Excerpt
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TRAVELS

IN

EGYPT AND NUBIA.

LETTER I.

TOUR IN EGYPT AND NUBIA.

Description of the party and object of pursuit.—Departure from Philæ.—Arrive at Second Cataract.—Elpha.—Ebsambal.—Open the great temple.—Derry Kalapsche.—Return to Philæ.—Pass through the Cataract.—Visit Assuan.—Thebes.—Tentyra.—Arrive at Cairo.

CAIRO, September 27, 1817.

WE arrived here on the first instant, having made a much longer trip than we had intended; the reason of this I shall explain in its proper place, and in the mean time proceed to a continuation of our narrative, from where my last letter, dated in June, concluded. I think I mentioned before, that we had joined, at Philæ, Messrs. Beechey and Belzoni; the latter is Mr. Salt's agent. Their principal object in going up to the second cataract, was to endeavour to open the great temple at Ebsambal, by desire of Mr. Salt, which Mr.

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Belzoni had attempted the preceding year. The whole face of the temple, as high as the heads of the statues which are in front of it, was buried in the sand which had been blown from the desert. This sand, in the course of time, had accumulated to such a degree, as not only to fill up the whole of the valley through which it had passed, but also to form a mountain, sloping from the front of the temple, for two or three hundred yards towards the banks of the Nile. From all external appearance it is probable this temple, which is hewn out of the live rock, had been shut for many centuries, perhaps for more than two thousand years; and in that case, if it had not suffered too much in the general pillage and destruction which all the sacred edifices underwent at the conquest of Egypt, by Cambyses and other subsequent princes, it was hoped that something interesting to the antiquarian might be discovered.

We considered it a fortunate circumstance for us to have an opportunity of joining in so interesting an undertaking, and as it is advisable that travellers should be both numerous and well armed in Nubia, the junction of us four, together with Mr. Beechey's Greek servant, an Arab cook, and a janissary, composed a tolerably strong party. We could only add one solitary musket to a pretty good stock of arms of every descrip-

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tion which Mr. Beechey had with him. We hired a boat, which belonged to a village situated on a point amidst a cluster of date-trees which bounds the view of the river from Philæ to the southward: the crew consisted of five men, including the reis or captain, and three boys: three of the men and the reis were brothers, and the fifth was their brother-in-law, having married their sister; this latter was dressed in a blue shirt, from which circumstance we nick-named him the “blue devil;” his real name was Hassan; he will be by and by a conspicuous character in this narrative. The boys were sons of some one or other of the crew, and the boat they said belonged to the father of them all, an old man who wore a green turban, as a descendant of the prophet.

In the afternoon of the sixteenth, we started with a fine fair wind, having first settled a quarrel between two of our crew, in which one of the party was cut through the calf of the leg, to the bone: our agreement with the reis was for one hundred and sixty piastres per month, four pounds sterling; and at the end of the voyage, if they behaved well, a backsheesh or present was promised, a stipulation which always forms part of similar bargains in this country. It was expressly understood that the crew should find themselves.

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As we advanced upwards, the sand hills filling up the cavities between the black granite rocks presented a most remarkable contrast, the wind having drifted it very much; the surface in many places was quite fine and smooth, reminding one, with the exception of the difference of colour, of some of the scenery in Switzerland, where the snow before it cracks, and after it has been drifted fine, presents just such an appearance. The mountains here close much on the river, and we looked in vain for that rich plain which, in Egypt, is every where to be seen on the banks of the Nile. On the heights, as we proceeded, we saw several Saracenic buildings placed in most picturesque situations; they tend very much to set off this wild species of scenery; you also observe, throughout Nubia, numerous piles of stones placed on the most elevated and conspicuous parts of the mountains, to indicate the vicinity of the Nile to the caravans from the interior of Africa, as Darfur, Dongola, and other places.

Half a day's sail from Philæ, conducted us to the finishing of the granite rocks, which now gave place to those of calcareous stone, though on the river side, in most instances, their exterior still retains a black colour and a polish. The vein of red granite, which begins below Assuan, and extends beyond Philæ, is supposed to continue in

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From an Original Sketch by F. W. Beechey Esq

Drawn by Stone by J. D. Harding

NARROW PASSAGE OF THE NILE, BETWEEN PHILOE AND KALAPSHÉ

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an easterly direction till it joms the shores of the Red Sea, keeping, nearly throughout the same breadth ; the observations which we made on our trips into the desert from Assuan, tended to confirm this opinion.

On the afternoon of the seventeenth we came to a place where the mountains close upon the river in a very abrupt manner, leaving no level land on the banks ; the hills at the same time presented some very grand though rude scenery. This, by some travellers, is termed the boundary between Egypt and Nubia, though I should be inclined to agree with the French, that the first cataract is a more natural limit to the two countries ; as, immediately above Assuan, you perceive not only a country quite different from that below, but even natives of a character and colour in no way resembling the Egyptians, differently clothed, and speaking another language.

This evening we arrived at Kalapsche, and as we had to wait some time while our janissary was buying provisions, we went up to inspect the temple, though we had agreed to visit the antiquities in general as we returned from the second cataract. The ruins of this edifice are large and magnificent, but it has never been finished : it consists of a large peristyle hall, (most of the columns of which have fallen, and many are un-

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finished,) two chambers, and a sanctuary. The exterior walls are smooth, the sculpture not having even been commenced, and in the interior it is not finished, there being in no instance either stucco or painting. There has been first a quay on the river's side, and then a flight of steps as an approach to the temple. We reserved the measurements, &c. till our return : the outer hall had several Greek inscriptions in it, some of them in tolerable perfection.

In the evening, before we stopped, we passed two crocodiles, they were on a shoal in the middle of the Nile, and retired before we got near them : they were the first we had seen since we left Philæ ; indeed they are never met with near that island. On the nineteenth a foul wind obliged us to stop, when an old man came to beg medicine, thinking we were *hackim*, or physicians, a strange notion which all barbarous nations have respecting Europeans : we gave him some advice, though we declined any pretensions to the title he had given us. Bruce, in making himself acquainted with the rudiments of physic, shewed how well he judged of the proper mode of travelling in these countries ; and his narrative proves how much he benefitted by this knowledge. Our denial of all knowledge of physic met with little belief among the natives, and to induce us to give them assist-

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ance, they offered two fowls for any aid we would render to their patients. On the twentieth we saw a camel swimming across the river; one man swam before with a halter in his mouth, leading the animal, another followed behind.

June 21. We this day observed, immediately opposite Duckie, two lads crossing the river which is here tolerably wide, and pushing and towing a laden reed raft.

On the twenty-second observed the purple acassia; it bears some resemblance to a shrub, and is evidently a dwarf species of the mimosa; never attaining a height beyond a foot or fifteen inches; excepting in colour, the flower is like the yellow acassia. On the twenty-third our crew killed a snake that was basking on the river side; it was gray, with two black marks below its head. It was curious to see the precautions they used before they would surprise this reptile, which they represented as poisonous, though I did not believe it was so. We had this morning a regular wild-goose chase after an old one and four young ones; the crew jumped overboard and caught them all, though with some difficulty. I mention this merely to give you some idea how expert these people are in the water; they may almost be said to be amphibious.

June 24. This day we were opposite Koroskoff

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in the morning; we purchased a sheep for nine piastres, but were obliged to send the money before they would even shew the animal; we remonstrated much against this curious method of making a bargain, but nothing would induce them to change their plan. We this day saw the calibash growing wild on creepers up the acassia-trees on the river side; our crew got three very good ones; the boys also found a sort of wild currant growing close to the water side; we tasted some, and thought them not unlike the blue-berry, though not shaped like them, being round; in size and colour they are alike.

Our custom was always to bathe morning and evening regularly, frequently oftener; this evening, while at this recreation, Mr. Belzoni was bitten in the foot, which caused him to cry out somewhat loudly for assistance; next morning he was bitten again, in the same place; this last time fetched blood, taking a piece out of the toe. The animal must have been small; he plainly felt something twisting round his leg; we all agree in thinking it must have been a water lizard. I should have told you, the other day a man hailed us and asked "if we would buy a spy-glass;" he said he was a native of Senaar: we thought it must be the property of some European who had been robbed, and therefore said we would see it first;

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in consequence he came into the boat, to be carried to the village where it was (about four hours' sail above); however, on arriving there he walked off, and we never heard again either of him or his glass; the fact is, he wanted a passage, and you, I am sure, will give him credit for so cunning a method of getting one. It is by these little traits that one can judge of the character of people of this description.

June 25. We this day arrived near Koroskoff, at the point where the river reaches the southernmost point, before the beginning of the second cataract; for the ascent of the river here turns due north, and continues in that direction between ten and fifteen miles; after which it becomes S. W. and then west to the second cataract. The Nile here assumes a picturesque appearance, having several islands and rocks in the centre of it. In the evening our janissary shot a wild-goose; its plumage was beautiful, and its taste exceedingly good, though we had not the means of cooking it in a very savoury manner.

June 26. Observed the Nile to have *fallen* about one and a half foot; it is now twenty-two days since it began to *rise*; it is already above the cataract of Syene (Assuan).

June 27. We this day saw two crocodiles; our men requested us to fire some muskets to

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frighten them away, but were not afraid of towing the bark in the water close to the bank were we observed them; I think, from what we have noticed of these animals, that if ever they do attack people, it is but very seldom. This morning a man on horseback came down to the river side, and said he was sent by Halleel Cashief with salam alicams (compliments): he, however, seemed more intent to get something for himself; and in a moment enumerated several articles which he requested us to give him; such as coffee, snuff, gunpowder, salt, &c.; we told him we had none to spare, as we reserve those articles for Hassan Cashief, the chief person in this country, and whose favour it is necessary to gain by presents, in order to get permission to open the temple at Ebsambal, one of the principal objects of the expedition; that chief has pledged his word to Mr. Belzoni, that none but the English should be allowed to work there, on condition that he, Hassan, was to have half the *gold* that was found in it: for these people have no idea that our researches for antiquities in this country, have any other view than to get treasure; and they laugh when we tell them we are looking for stone statues, and slabs of that material, with inscriptions on them. They cannot conceive what motive can induce us to come such