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PASSING THE CATARACT OF THE NILE.

At last, twenty-four days from Cairo, the Nubian hills are in sight, lifting themselves up in the south, and we appear to be getting into the real Africa — Africa, which still keeps its savage secret, and dribbles down this commercial highway, the Nile, as it has for thousands of years, its gums and spices and drugs, its tusks and skins of wild animals, its rude weapons and its cunning work in silver, its slave boys and slave girls. These native boats that we meet, piled with strange and fragrant merchandise, rowed by antic crews of Nubians whose ebony bodies shine in the sun as they walk backward and forward at the long sweeps, chanting a weird, barbarous refrain — what tropical freights are theirs for the imagination!

At sunset we are in a lonesome place; the swift river flowing between narrow, rocky shores, the height beyond Assouan gray in the distance, and vultures watching our passing boat from the high, crumbling sandstone ledges. The night falls sweet and cool, the soft new moon is remote in the almost purple depths, the thickly strewn stars blaze like jewels, and we work slowly on at the rate of a mile an hour, with the slightest wind, amid the granite rocks of the channel. In this channel we are in the shadow of the old historical seat of empire, the island of Elephantine, and turning into

the narrow passage to the left we announce, by a rocket, to the dahabeeahs moored at Assouan the arrival of another inquisitive American. It is Sunday night. Our dragoman dispatches a messenger to the chief reis of the cataract, who lives at Philæ, five miles above. A second one is sent in the course of the night, and a third meets the old patriarch on his way to our boat at sunrise. It is necessary to impress the Oriental mind with the importance of the travelers who have arrived at the gate of Nubia.

The Nile voyager who moors his dahabeeah at the sandbank, with the fleet of merchant boats, above Assouan, seems to be at the end of his journey. Travelers from the days of Herodotus even to this century have followed each other in saying that the roar of the cataract deafened people for miles around. Civilization has tamed the rapids. Now there is neither sight nor sound of them here at Assouan. To the southward the granite walls which no doubt once dammed the river have been broken through by some pre-historic convulsion that strewed the fragments about in grotesque confusion. The island of Elephantine, originally a long heap of granite, is thrown into the middle of the Nile, dividing it into two narrow streams. The southern end rises from the water, a bold mass of granite.



Its surface is covered with ruins, or rather with the *débris* of many civilizations; and into this mass and these hills of bricks, stones, pottery, and ashes, Nubian women and children may be seen constantly poking, digging out coins, beads, and images, to sell to the howadji. The northern portion of the island is green with wheat, and it supports two or three mud villages, which offer a good field for the tailor and the missionary.

The passage through the eastern channel, from Assouan to Elephantine, is between walls of granite rocks; and southward, at the end of it, the view is bounded by a field of broken granite, gradually rising and apparently forbidding egress in that direction. If the traveler comes for scenery, as some do, nothing could be wilder and at the same time more beautiful than these fantastically piled crags; but considered as a navigable highway, the river here is a failure.

Early in the morning the head sheik of the cataract comes on board, and the long confab which is preliminary to any undertaking begins. There are always as many difficulties in the way of a trade or an arrangement as there are quills on a porcupine; and a great part of the Egyptian bargaining is the preliminary plucking out of these quills. The cataracts are the hereditary property of the Nubian sheiks and their tribes, who live near them, belonging to them more completely than the rapids of the St. Lawrence to the Indian pilots; almost their whole livelihood comes from helping boats up and down the rapids, and their harvest season is the winter, when the dahabeeahs of the howadji require their assistance. They magnify the difficulties and dangers, and make a mystery of their skill and knowledge. But, with true Orientalism, they appear to seek rather to lessen than to increase their business. They oppose intolerable delays to the traveler, keep him waiting at Assouan by a thousand excuses, and do all they can to drive him discouraged down the river. During this winter boats have been kept waiting two weeks on one frivolous excuse or another: the

day was unlucky, or the wind was unfavorable, or some prince had the preference. Princes have been very much in the way this winter; the fact would seem to be that European princes are getting to run up the Nile in shoals, as plenty as shad in the Connecticut, more being hatched at home than Europe has employment for.

Several thousand people, dwelling along the banks from Assouan to three or four miles above Philæ, share in the profits of the passing boats; and although the sheiks and head rises (or captains) of the cataract get the elephant's share, every family receives something — it may be only a piaster or two — on each dahabeeah; and the sheiks draw from the villages as many men as are required for each passage. It usually takes two days for a boat to go up the cataract, and not seldom they are kept in it three or four days, and sometimes a week. The first day the boat gets as far as the island of Séhayl, where it ties up and waits for the cataract people to gather next morning. They may take it into their heads not to gather, in which case the traveler can sun himself all day on the rocks, or hunt up the inscriptions which the Pharaohs, on their raids into Africa for slaves and other luxuries, cut in the granite in their days of leisure, three or four thousand years ago, before the world got its present impetus of hurry. Or they may come and pull the boat up a rapid or two, then declare they have not men enough for the final struggle, and leave it for another night in the roaring desolation. To put on force enough and cables strong enough not to break, and promptly drag the boat through in one day, would lessen the money value of the achievement, perhaps, in the mind of the owner of the boat. Nature has done a great deal to make the First Cataract an obstacle to navigation, but the wily Nubian could teach nature a lesson; at any rate he has never relinquished the key to the gates. He owns the cataract, as the Bedawees own the pyramids of Gizeh and the routes across the desert to Sinai and Petra.



The aged reis comes on board, and the preliminary ceremonies, exchange of compliments religious and social, between him and our astute dragoman begin. Coffee is made, the reis's pipe is lighted, and the conversation is directed slowly to the ascent of the cataract. The head reis is accompanied by two or three others of inferior dignity, and by attendants who squat on the deck in attitudes of patient indifference. The world was not made in a day. The reis looks along the deck and says, —

"This boat is very large; it is too long to go up the cataract."

There is no denying it. The dahab-beeah is longer than almost any other on the river; it is one hundred and twenty feet long. The dragoman says, —

"But you took up General McClellan's boat, and that is large."

"Very true, effendi; but why the howadji no come when Genel Clemen come, ten days ago?"

"We chose to come now."

"Such a long boat never went up. Why you no come two months ago, when the river was high?" This sort of talk goes on for half an hour. Then the other sheik speaks: —

"What is the use of talking all this stuff to Mohammed Effendi Abd-el-Atti; he knows all about it."

"That is true. We will go."

"Well, it is 'finish,'" says Abd-el-Atti.

When the long negotiation is concluded, the reis is introduced into the cabin to pay his respects to the howadji; he seats himself with dignity and salutes the ladies with a watchful self-respect. The reis is a grave Nubian, with finely cut features, — but a good many shades darker than would be fellowshipped by the Sheltering Wings Association, in America, — small feet, and small hands with long, tapering fingers that confess an aristocratic exemption from manual labor. He wears a black gown and a white turban; a camel's-hair scarf distinguishes him from the vulgar. This sheik boasts, I suppose, as ancient blood as runs in any aristocratic veins; counting his ancestors back in unbroken suc-

cession to the days of the prophet at least, and not improbably to Ishmael. That he wears neither stockings nor slippers does not detract from his simple dignity. Our conversation while he pays his visit is confined to the smoking of a cigar and some well-meant grins and smiles of mutual good feeling.

While the morning hours pass, we have time to gather all the knowledge of Assouan that one needs for the enjoyment of life in this world. It is an ordinary Egyptian town of sun-baked brick, brown, dusty, and unclean, with shabby bazars containing nothing, and full of unrelenting beggars and insatiable traders in curiosities of the upper country. Importunate venders beset the traveler as soon as he steps ashore, offering him all manner of trinkets, which he is eager to purchase and does n't know what to do with when he gets them. There are crooked, odd-shaped knives and daggers, in ornamental sheaths of crocodile skin, and savage spears, with great rough hippopotamus shields, from Kartoom or Abyssinia; jagged iron spears and lances and ebony clubs from Darfour; cunning Nubian silver work, bracelets and great rings that have been worn by desert camel drivers; moth-eaten ostrich feathers; bows and arrows tipped with flint from the Soudan; necklaces of glass and dirty leather charms (containing words from the Koran); broad bracelets and anklets cut out of big tusks of elephants and traced in black; rude swords that it needs two hands to swing; bracelets of twisted silver cord and solid silver as well; ear-rings so large that they must be hitched to a strand of the hair for support; nose-rings of brass and silver and gold as large as the ear-rings; and Nubian "costumes" for women, — a string with leather fringe depending, to tie about the loins, — suggestions of a tropical life under the old dispensation.

The beach, crowded with trading vessels and piled up with merchandise, presents a lively picture. There are piles of Manchester cotton and boxes of English brandy — to warm outwardly and inwardly the natives of the Soudan —



which are being loaded, for transport above the rapids, upon kneeling dromedaries that protest against the load in that most vulgar guttural of all animal sounds, more uncouth and less musical than the agonized bray of the donkey, a sort of grating menagerie grumble which has neither the pathos of the sheep's bleat nor the dignity of the lion's growl; and there are bales of cinnamon and senna and ivory to go down the river. The wild Bishareen Arab attends his dromedaries; he has a clear-cut and rather delicate face, is bareheaded, wears his black hair in ringlets long upon his shoulders, and has for all dress a long strip of brown cotton cloth twisted about his body and his loins, leaving the legs and right arm free. There are the fat, sleek Greek merchant, in sumptuous white Oriental costume, lounging amid his merchandize; the Syrian in gay apparel, with pistols in his shawl belt, preparing for his journey to Kartoom; and the black Nubian sailors asleep on the sand. To add a little color to the picture, a Ghawazee, or dancing-girl, in striped, flaming red gown and red slippers, dark but comely, covered with gold or silver gilt necklaces and bracelets, is walking about the shore, seeking whom she may devour.

At twelve o'clock we are ready to push off. The wind is strong from the north. The cataract men swarm on board, two or three sheiks and thirty or forty men. They take command and possession of the vessel, and our reis and crew give way. We have carefully closed the windows and blinds of our boat, for the cataract men are reputed to have long arms and fingers that crook easily. The Nubians run about like cats; four are at the helm, some are on the bow, all are talking and giving orders; there is an indescribable bustle and whirl as our boat is shoved off from the sand, with the chorus of "Hā! Yālēsah! Hā! Yālēsah!"<sup>1</sup> and takes the current. The great sail, shaped like a bird's wing, and a hundred feet long, is

shaken out forward, and we pass swiftly on our way between the granite walls. The excited howadji are on deck, feeling to their finger-ends the thrill of expectancy.

The first thing the Nubians want is something to eat, a chronic complaint here in this land of romance. Squatting in circles all over the boat, they dip their hands into the bowls of softened bread, cramming the food down their throats, and swallowing all the coffee that can be made for them, with the gusto and appetite of simple men who have a stomach and no conscience.

While the Nubians are chattering and eating, we are gliding up the swift stream, the granite rocks opening a passage for us; but at the end of it our way seems to be barred. The only visible opening is on the extreme left, where a small stream struggles through the bowlders. While we are wondering if that can be our course, the helm is suddenly put hard about, we turn short to the right, finding our way, amid whirlpools and shoulders of granite, past the head of Elephantine Island; and before we have recovered from this surprise we turn sharply to the left into a narrow passage, and the cataract is before us.

It is not at all what we have expected. In appearance this is a cataract without any falls and scarcely any rapids. A person brought up on Niagara or Montmorency feels himself trifled with here. The fisherman in the mountain streams of America has come upon many a scene that resembles this, a river-bed strewn with bowlders. Only, this is on a grand scale. We had been led to expect at least high precipices, walls of lofty rock, between which we should sail in the midst of raging rapids and falls, with hundreds of savages on the rocks above, dragging our boat with cables, and occasionally plunging into the torrent in order to carry a life-line to the top of some wave-girt rock. All of this we did not see; yet we had more respect crew poled along, "Hā! Yālēsah!" And still the Nile boatmen call Yālēsah to come, as they push the poles and haul the sail, and urge the boat towards Abyssinia.

<sup>1</sup> Yālēsah (I spell the name according to the sound of the pronunciation) was one of the sons of Noah who was absent at the time the ark sailed, having gone down into Abyssinia. They pushed the ark in pursuit of him, and Noah called after his son as the



for the cataract before we got through it than when it first came in sight.

What we see immediately before us is a basin, it may be quarter of a mile, it may be half a mile broad, and two miles long; a wide expanse of broken granite rocks and bowlders strewn hap-hazard, some of them showing the red of the syenite, and others black and polished and shining in the sun; a field of rocks, none of them high, fantastic in shape; and through this field the river breaks in a hundred twisting passages and chutes, all apparently small, but the water in them is foaming and leaping and flashing white; and the air begins to be pervaded by the multitudinous roar of rapids. On the east, the side of the land-passage between Assouan and Philæ, are high and jagged rocks in odd forms, now and then a palm-tree, and here and there a mud village. On the west the basin of the cataract is hemmed in by the desert hills, and the yellow Libyan sand drifts over them in shining waves which in some lights have the almost maroon color that we see in Gérôme's pictures. To the south is an impassable barrier of granite and sand — mountains of them — beyond the glistening fields of rocks and water through which we are to find our way.

The difficulty of this navigation is — not one cataract to be overcome by one heroic effort, but a hundred little cataracts or swift, tortuous sluice-ways, which are much more formidable when we get into them than they appear when seen at a distance. The dahabeahs which attempt to wind through them are in constant danger of having holes knocked in their hulls by the rocks.

The wind is strong, and we are sailing swiftly on. It is impossible to tell which one of the half-dozen equally uninviting channels we are to take. We guess, and of course point out the wrong one. We approach, with sails still set, a narrow passage through which the water pours in what is a very respectable torrent; but it is not a straight passage, it has a bend in it; if we get through it, we must make a sharp turn to the left or run upon a ridge of rocks,

and even then we shall be in a boiling surge; and if we fail to make head against the current we shall go whirling down the caldron, bumping on the rocks, not a pleasant thing for a dahabeah one hundred and twenty feet long, with a cabin in it as large as a hotel. The passage of a-boat of this size is evidently an event of some interest to the cataract people, for we see groups of them watching us from the rocks, and following along the shore. And we think that seeing our boat go up from the shore might be the best way of seeing it.

We draw slowly in, the boat trembling at the entrance of the swift water; it enters, nosing the current, feeling the tug of the sail, and hesitates. Oh, for a strong puff of wind! There are five watchful men at the helm; there is a moment's silence, and the boat still hesitates. At this critical instant, while we hold our breath, a naked man, whose name I am sorry I cannot give to an admiring American public, appears on the bow with a rope in his teeth; he plunges in and makes for the nearest rock. He swims hand over hand, swinging his arms from the shoulder out of water and striking them forward, splashing along like a side-wheeler, the common way of swimming in the heavy water of the Nile. Two other black figures follow him, and the rope is made fast to the point of the rock. We have something to hold us against the stream.

And now a terrible tumult arises on board the boat, which is seen to be covered with men; one gang is hauling on the rope to draw the great sail close to its work; another gang is hauling on the rope attached to the rock, and both are singing that wild, chanting chorus without which no Egyptian sailor pulls an ounce or lifts a pound. The men who are not pulling are shouting and giving orders; the sheiks, on the upper deck, where we sit with exaggerated American serenity amid the babel, are jumping up and down in a frenzy of excitement, screaming and gesticulating. We hold our own; we gain a little; we pull forward where the danger of a smash



against the rocks is increased. More men appear on the rocks, whom we take to be spectators of our passage. No; they lay hold of the rope. With the additional help we still tremble in the jaws of the pass. I walk aft, and the stern is almost upon the sharp rocks; it grazes them; but in the nick of time the bow swings round, we turn short off into an eddy; the great sail is let go, and our cat-like sailors are aloft, crawling along the slender yard, which is a hundred feet in length, and furling the tugging canvas. We breathe more freely, for the first danger is over. The gate is passed.

In this lull there is a confab with the sheiks. We are at the island of Séhayl, and have accomplished what is usually the first day's journey of boats. It would be in harmony with the Oriental habit to stop here for the remainder of the day and for the night. But our dragoman has in mind to accomplish, if not the impossible, what is synonymous with it in the East, the unusual. The result of the inflammatory stump speeches on both sides is that two or three gold pieces are passed into the pliant hand of the head sheik, and he sends for another sheik and more men.

For some time we have been attended by increasing processions of men and boys on shore; they cheered us as we passed the first rapid; they come out from the villages, from the crevices of the rocks, their blue and white gowns blowing in the wind, and make a sort of holiday of our passage. Less conspicuous at first are those without gowns; they are hardly distinguishable from the black rocks amid which they move. As we lie here, with the rising roar of the rapids in our ears, we can see no further opening for our passage.

But we are preparing to go on. Ropes are carried out forward over the rocks. More men appear to aid us. We said there were fifty. We count seventy; we count eighty; there are at least ninety. They come up by a sort of magic. From whence are they, these black forms? They seem to grow out of the rocks at the wave of the sheik's

hand; they are of the same color, shining men of granite. The swimmers and divers are simply smooth statues hewn out of the syenite or the basalt. They are not unbaked clay like the rest of us. One expects to see them disappear like stones when they jump into the water. The mode of our navigation is to draw the boat along, hugg'd close to the shore rocks, so close that the current cannot get full hold of it, and thus to work it round the bends.

We are crawling slowly on in this manner, clinging to the rocks, when unexpectedly a passage opens to the left. The water before us runs like a mill-race. If we enter it, nothing would seem sufficient to hold the boat from dashing down amid the breakers. But the bow is hardly allowed to feel the current before it is pulled short around, and we are swinging in the swift stream. Before we know it we are in the anxiety of another tug. Suppose the rope should break! In an instant the black swimmers are overboard, striking out for the rocks; two ropes are sent out and secured; and, with gangs hauling on them, we are working through inch by inch, everybody on board trembling with excitement. We look at our watches; it seems only fifteen minutes since we left Assuan; it is an hour and a quarter. Do we gain in the chute? It is difficult to say; the boat hangs back and strains at the cables; but just as we are in the pinch of doubt, the big sail unfolds its wing with exciting suddenness, a strong gust catches it, we feel the lift, and creep upward, amid an infernal din of singing and shouting and calling on the prophet from the gangs who haul in the sail-rope, who tug at the cables attached to the rocks, who are pulling at the hawsers on the shore. We forge ahead and are about to dash into a boiling caldron, from which there appears to be no escape, when a skillful turn of the great, creaking helm once more throws us to the left, and we are again in an eddy, with the stream whirling by us, and the sail is let go and is furled.

The place where we lie is barely long enough to admit our boat; the stern just



clears the rocks, the bow is aground on hard sand. The number of men and boys on the rocks has increased; it is over one hundred; it is one hundred and thirty; on a second count it is one hundred and fifty. An anchor is now carried out to hold us in position when we make a new start; more ropes are taken to the shore, two hitched to the bow and one to the stern. Straight before us is a narrow passage through which the water comes in foaming ridges with extraordinary rapidity. It seems to be our way; but of course it is not. We are to turn the corner sharply, before reaching it; what will happen then, we shall see.

There is a slight lull in the excitement, while the extra hawsers are got out and preparations are made for the next struggle. The sheiks light their long pipes, and, squatting on deck, gravely wait. The men who have tobacco roll up cigarettes and smoke them. The swimmers come on board for refreshment. The poor fellows are shivering as if they had an ague fit. The Nile may be friendly, though it does not offer a warm bath at this time of the year, and when they come out of it naked on the rocks, the cold north wind sets their white teeth chattering. The dragoman brings out a bottle of brandy. It is none of your ordinary brandy, but must have cost over a dollar a gallon, and would burn a hole in a new piece of cotton cloth. He pours out a tumblerful of it, and offers it to one of the granite men. The granite man pours it down his throat in one flow, without moving an eyelash, and holds the glass out for another draught. His throat must be lined with zinc. A second tumblerful follows the first. It is like pouring liquor into a brazen image.

I said there was a lull, but this is only in contrast to the preceding fury. There is still noise enough, over and above the roar of the waters, in the preparations going forward, the din of a hundred people screaming together, each one giving orders and elaborating his opinion by a rhetorical use of his hands. The waiting crowd scattered over the rocks disposes itself pictur-

esquely, as an Arab crowd always does, and probably cannot help doing, in its blue and white gowns and white turbans. In the midst of these preparations, and unmindful of any excitement or confusion, a sheik, standing upon a little square of sand amid the rocks, and so close to the deck of the boat that we can hear his "Allah akbar" (God is most great), begins his kneelings and prostrations towards Mecca, and continues at his prayers, as undisturbed and as unregarded as if he were in a mosque, and wholly oblivious of the babel around him. So common has religion become in this land of its origin! Here is a half-clad sheik of the desert, stopping in the midst of his contract to take the howadji up the cataract, in order to raise his forefinger and say, "I testify that there is no deity but God; and I testify that Mohammed is his servant and his apostle."

Judging by the eye, the double turn we have next to make is too short to admit our long hull. It does not seem possible that we can squeeze through; but we try. We first swing out and take the current as if we were going straight up the rapids. We are held by two ropes from the stern, while by four ropes from the bow, three on the left shore and one on an islet to the right, the cataract people are tugging to draw us up. As we watch, almost breathless, the strain on the ropes, look! there is a man in the tumultuous rapid before us swiftly coming down as if to his destruction. Another one follows, and then another, till there are half a dozen men and boys in this jeopardy, this situation of certain death to anybody not made of cork. And the singular thing about it is that the men are seated upright, sliding down the shining water like a boy, who has no respect for his trousers, down a sand-bank. As they dash past us, we see that each is seated on a round log about five feet long; some of them sit upright with their legs on the log, displaying the soles of their feet, keeping the equilibrium with their hands. These are smooth, slimy logs, that a white man



would find it difficult to sit on if they were on shore, and in this water they would turn with him only once: the log would go one way and the man another. But these fellows are in no fear of the rocks below; they easily guide their barks out of the rushing floods, through the whirlpools and eddies, into the slack shore water in the rear of the boat, and stand up like men and demand backsheesh. These logs are popular ferry-boats in the Upper Nile; I have seen a woman crossing the river on one, her clothes in a basket and the basket on her head—and the Nile is nowhere an easy stream to swim.

Far ahead of us the cataract people are seen in lines and groups, half-hidden by the rocks, pulling and stumbling on. Black figures are scattered, lifting the ropes over the jagged stones, and freeing them so that we shall not be drawn back, as we slowly advance; and severe as their toil is, it is not enough to keep them warm when the chilly wind strikes them. They get bruised on the rocks also, and have time to show us their barked shins and request backsheesh. An Egyptian is never too busy or too much in peril to forget to prefer that request at the sight of a traveler. When we turn into the double twist I spoke of above, the bow goes sideways upon a rock, and the stern is not yet free. The punt poles are brought into requisition; half the men are in the water; there is poling and pushing and grunting, heaving and "Yah Mohammed! yah Mohammed!" with all which noise and outlay of brute strength the boat moves a little on and still is held close in hand. The current runs very swiftly. We have to turn almost by a right angle to the left and then by the same angle to the right; and the question is whether the boat is not too long to turn in the space. We just scrape along the rocks, the current growing every moment stronger, and at length get far enough to let the stern swing. I run back to see if it will go free. It is a close fit. The stern is clear; but if our boat had been four or five feet longer, her voyage would have ended then and there.

There is now before us a straight pull up the swiftest and narrowest rapid we have thus far encountered.

Our sandal, — the row-boat belonging to the dahabeeah, that becomes a felucca when a mast is stepped into it, — which has accompanied us fitfully during the passage, appearing here and there tossing about amid the rocks, and aiding occasionally in the transport of ropes and men to one rock and another, now turns away to seek a less difficult passage. The rocks all about us are low, from three feet to ten feet high. We have one rope out ahead, fastened to a rock, upon which stands a gang of men, pulling. There is a row of men in the water under the left side of the boat, heaving at her with their broad backs, to prevent her smashing on the rocks. But our main dragging force is in the two long lines of men attached to the ropes on the left shore. They stretch out ahead of us so far that it needs an opera-glass to discover whether the leaders are pulling or only soldiering. These two long, straggling lines are led and directed by a new figure who appears upon this shifting operatic scene. It is a comical sheik, who stands upon a high rock at one side and lines out the catch-line of a working refrain, while the gangs howl and haul in a surging chorus. Nothing could be wilder or more ludicrous, in the midst of this roar of rapids and strain of cordage. The sheik holds a long staff, which he swings like the *bâton* of the leader of an orchestra, quite unconscious of the odd figure he cuts against the blue sky. He grows more and more excited, he swings his arms, he shrieks, but always in tune and in time with the hauling and with the wilder chorus of the cataract men; he is in the very ecstasy of the musical conductor, displaying his white teeth, and raising first one leg and then the other in a delirious, swinging motion, all the more picturesque on account of his flowing blue robe and his loose white cotton drawers. He lifts his leg with a gigantic pull, which is enough in itself to draw the boat onward, and every time he does it the boat gains on the cur-



rent. Surely such an orchestra and such a leader were never seen before. For the orchestra is scattered over half an acre of ground, swaying, pulling, and singing in rhythmic show; and there is a high wind and a blue sky, with rocks and foaming torrents, and an African village with palms in the background, amid the débris of some pre-historic earthquake. Slowly we creep up against the stiff, boiling stream, the good Moslems on deck muttering prayers and telling their beads, and finally make the turn and pass the worst eddies; and as we swing round into an ox-bow channel to the right, the big sail is again let out and hauled in, and with cheers we float on some rods and come into a quiet shelter, a stage beyond the journey usually made the first day. It is now three o'clock. We have come to the real cataract, to the stiffest pull and the most dangerous passage.

A small freight-dahabeeah obstructs the way, and while this is being hauled ahead we prepare for the final struggle. The chief cataract is called Bab (gate) Aboo Rabbia, from one of Mohammed Ali's captains, who some years ago vowed that he would take his dahabeeah up it with his own crew and without aid from the cataract people. He lost his boat. It is also sometimes called Bab Inglese, from a young Englishman named Cave, who attempted to swim down it early one morning, in imitation of the Nubian swimmers, and was drawn into the whirlpools, and not found for days after. For this last struggle, in addition to the other ropes, an enormous cable is bent on, not tied to the bow, but twisted round the cross-beams of the forward deck, and carried out over the rocks. From the shelter where we lie we are to push out and take the current at a sharp angle. The water of this main cataract sucks down from both sides above through a channel perhaps one hundred feet wide, very rapid from its considerable fall, and with such force as to raise a ridge in the middle. To pull up this hill of water is the tug; if the ropes let go we shall be dashed into a hundred pieces on the rocks be-

low, and be swallowed in the whirlpools. It would not be a sufficient compensation for such a fate to have this rapid hereafter take our name.

The preparations are leisurely made; the lines are laid along the rocks and the men are distributed. The fastenings are carefully examined. Then we begin to move. There are now four conductors of this gigantic orchestra (the employment of which as a musical novelty I respectfully recommend to the next Boston Jubilee), each posted on a high rock and waving a stick with a white rag tied on it. It is four o'clock. An hour has been consumed in raising the curtain for the last act. We are carefully under way along the rocks, which are almost within reach, held tight by the side ropes, but pushed off and slowly urged along by a line of half-naked fellows under the left side, whose backs are against the boat and whose feet walk along the perpendicular ledge. It would take only a sag of the boat, apparently, to crush them. It does not need our eyes to tell us when the bow of the boat noses the swift water. Our sandal has meantime carried a line to a rock on the opposite side of the channel, and our sailors haul on this and draw us ahead. But we are held firmly by the shore lines. The boat is never suffered, as I said, to get an inch the advantage, but is always held tight in hand.

As we appear at the foot of the rapid, men come riding down it on logs, as before, a sort of horseback feat in the boiling water, steering themselves round the eddies and landing below us. One of them swims round to the rock where a line is tied, and looses it as we pass; another, sitting on the slippery stick and showing the white soles of his black feet, paddles himself about amid the whirlpools. We move so slowly that we have time to enjoy all these details, to admire the deep yellow of the Libyan sand drifted over the rocks at the right, and to cheer a sandal bearing the American flag which is at this moment shooting the rapids in another channel beyond us, tossed about like a cork. We see the meteor flag flashing out, we lose it be-



hind the rocks, and catch it again appearing below. "Oh star spang—" but our own orchestra is in full swing again. The comical sheik begins to sway his arms and his stick back and forth in an increasing measure, until his whole body is drawn into the vortex of his enthusiasm, and one leg after the other, by a sort of rhythmic hitch, goes up, displaying the white and baggy cotton drawers. The other three conductors join in, and a deafening chorus rises from two hundred men all along the ropes, while we creep slowly on amid the suppressed excitement of those on board who anxiously watch the straining cables, and with a running fire of "Backsheesh, backsheesh!" from the boys on the rocks close at hand. The cable holds; the boat nags and jerks it in vain; through all the roar and rush we go on, lifted, I think, perceptibly every time the sheik lifts his leg.

At the right moment the sail is again shaken down, and the boat at once feels it. It is worth five hundred men. The ropes slacken; we are going by the wind against the current; haste is made to unbend the cable; line after line is let go, until we are held by one alone; the crowd thins out, dropping away with no warning, and before we know that the play is played out, the cataract people have lost all interest in it and are scattering over the black rocks to their homes. A few stop to cheer; the chief conductor is last seen on a rock, swinging the white rag, hurrahing and salaaming in grinning exultation; the last line is cast off, and we round the point and come into smooth but swift water, and glide on before a calm wind. The noise, the struggle, the tense strain, the uproar of men and waves for four hours, are all behind; and hours of keener excitement and enjoyment we have rarely known. At 12.20 we left Assouan; at 4.45 we swing round the rocky bend above the last and greatest rapid. I write these figures, for they will be not without a melancholy interest to those who have spent two and three days and even a week in making this passage.

Turning away from the ragged mount-

ains of granite which obstruct the straight course of the river, we sail by Mahatta, a little village of Nubians, a port where the trading and freight boats plying between the First and Second Cataract load and unload. There is a forest of masts and spars along the shore, which is piled with merchandise and dotted with sunlit figures squatting in the sand as if waiting for the goods to tranship themselves. With the sunlight slanting on our full sail we glide into the shadow of high rocks, and enter, with the suddenness of a first discovery, into a deep, winding river, the waters of which are dark and smooth, between lofty walls of granite. These historic masses, which have seen pass so many splendid processions and boastful expeditions of conquest in what seems to us the twilight of the world, and which excited the wonder of Father Herodotus only the other day, almost in our own time (for the Greeks belong to us and not to antiquity as it now unfolds itself), are piled in strange shapes, tottling rock upon rock, built up grotesquely, now in likeness of an animal, or the gigantic profile of a human face, or temple walls and castle towers and battlements. We wind through this solemn highway, and suddenly, in the very gateway, Philæ the lovely! Philæ, the most sentimental ruin in Egypt! There are the great pylon of the temple of Isis, the long colonnades of pillars, the beautiful square temple, with lofty columns and elongated capitals, misnamed Pharaoh's Bed. The little, oblong island, something like twelve hundred feet long, banded all round by an artificial wall, an island of rock completely covered with ruins, is set like the stone of a ring, with a circle of blue water about it, in the clasp of higher encircling granite peaks and ledges. On the left bank, as we turn to pass to the east of the island, is a gigantic rock which some persons have imagined was a colossus once, perhaps in pre-Adamite times, but which now has no resemblance to a human shape, except in a breast and left arm. Some Pharaoh cut his cartouche on the back — a sort of postage-stamp to pass the image along down the



ages. The Pharaohs were a vulgar lot; they cut their names wherever they could find a smooth and conspicuous place.

While we are looking, distracted with novelty at every turn, and excited by a grandeur and loveliness opening upon us every moment, we have come into a quiet haven, shut in on all sides by broken ramparts, alone with this island of temples. The sun is about to set, and its level light comes to us through the columns, and still gilds with red and yellow gold the Libyan sand sifted over the cliffs. We moor our boat to a sand-bank which has formed under the broken walls, and at once step on shore. We climb to the top of the temple walls; we walk on the stone roof; we glance into the temple on the roof where is sculptured the resurrection of Osiris. This cannot be called an old temple. It is a creation of the Ptolemies, though it doubtless replaced an older edifice. The temple of Isis was not begun more than three centuries before our era. Not all of these structures were finished; the priests must have been still carving on their walls the multitudes of sculptures when Christ began his mission; and more than four centuries after that the mysterious rites of Isis were still celebrated in their dark chambers. It is silent and dead enough here now; and there lives nowhere upon the earth any man who can even conceive the state of mind that gave those rites vitality. Even Egypt has changed its superstitions.

Peace has come upon the earth, after the strain of the last few hours. We can scarcely hear the roar of the rapids, in the beating of which we have been. The sun goes, leaving a changing yellow and faint orange on the horizon. Above, in the west, is the crescent moon; and now all the sky thereabout is rosy, even to the zenith, a delicate and yet deep color, like that of the blush rose; a transparent color that glows.

A little later we see from our boat the young moon, through the columns of the lesser temple. The January night is clear and perfectly dry; no dew is falling; no dew ever falls here; and the multiplied stars burn with uncommon lustre. When everything else is still, we hear the roar of the rapids coming steadily on the night breeze, sighing through the old and yet modern palace temples of the parvenu Ptolemies, and of Cleopatra; a new race of conquerors and pleasure-hunters, who in vain copied the magnificent works of the ancient Pharaohs.

Here on a pylon gate General Dessaix has recorded the fact that in February (Ventose) in the seventh year of the Republic, General Bonaparte being then in possession of Lower Egypt, he pursued to this spot the retreating Mamelukes. Egyptian kings, Ethiopian usurpers, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Nectanebes, Cambyses, Ptolemy Philadelphus, Cleopatra and her Roman lovers, Dessaix — these are all shades now.

*Charles Dudley Warner.*

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## IDENTITY.

SOMEWHERE, — in desolate, wind-swept space, —  
 In Twilight-land, in No-man's-land, —  
 Two hurrying Shapes met face to face,  
 And bade each other stand.

“And who are you?” cried one, agape,  
 Shuddering in the gloaming light.  
 “I do not know,” said the second Shape,  
 “I only died last night!”

*T. B. Aldrich.*