

CHAPTER I

A "civilised" trip up the Nile—Khartoum—A busy market—The hustling European and Oriental tempo—The scorpion—Filming girls—I own a sailing-boat and motor-car—Departure.

"WHOEVER has drunk the water of the Nile returns," runs an old Arab proverb, and thus I find myself once again on the deck of a steamer, dreaming my way towards the bright sun of Egypt. It was winter when I left Vienna, and cold rain had turned the snow-covered streets into a sea of mud. Thick grey fog followed us far out into the Mediterranean. Now our spirits rise at last as we see the sunny white houses of Alexandria appear in the distance. At four in the afternoon the *Helouan* moors at the quay.

The special train which I, like most of the passengers, am hoping to catch will be leaving for Cairo in two hours' time. I cheerfully have my eleven hundredweight of luggage conveyed to the Customs to be expeditiously disposed of, as I fondly imagine. I had taken the precaution of bringing in my pocket a list of my outfit, checked by the Austrian Customs authorities. In addition, I have receipts for everything I have with me. It had been trouble enough to get them, as many of the things had been in my possession for years. Thus armed, I might hope to be passed quickly. But it turns out otherwise: the Customs office here has no use for lists by foreign authorities, so every article has to be unpacked and shown. They have not finished examining the first case, which weighs two and a half hundredweight, when, with a lively whistle, my train steams out of the station. The devil! But now there is plenty of time till noon next day,

so I pile up my valuables in leisurely fashion before the astonished effendis. The large room soon looks like a warehouse. The examination began at 4.30. At nine I am glad to see the two big boxes disposed of. The officials are so kind as to postpone examination of the seven boxes of films and five of photographic material till the next morning at eight.

When I enter the Custom-house next day at that hour, not a soul is about, and it is fully half an hour before the first effendi arrives. He greets me most cordially—quite like an old friend—takes me into his room, has some cups of Turkish coffee brought, and embarks on a long conversation. By dint of much diplomacy I succeed, after three-quarters of an hour, in getting down to the examination. All the boxes must be opened, despite the Austrian Customs authorities' seal. When that has been done, tins come to light. They will have to be cut open. I protest vigorously, and try to make the official understand that the tropical moisture later on in my expedition will ruin the films. He consoles me, says he understands and will have them opened in a dark room. It takes a good hour before he grasps that it is not a question of light, but of damp. He pulls a thoughtful face and sends me to his superior, who will have to decide the matter. The Bey, at his newspaper and cup of Turkish coffee, looks up sleepily, scarcely listens to me, and remarks that the proper thing to do is to make a written application to the Ministry. To my modest objection that I do not propose to spend half a year in Egypt, but want to leave at midday, he shrugs his shoulders and goes on reading. Without further ado I apply to the General Director. This man, after I have expounded my difficulties, has some consideration for me. His Solomon's judgment is, "One box of films, one of negatives and one of flashlight materials shall be opened." If the contents agree with my declaration, he will graciously wink at the rest. Three boxes are therefore opened and found correct, the remaining eight are allowed to pass. An unexpected sum-

mons comes from the Bey, who an hour before was so immersed in his newspaper. Rather reluctantly I follow the messenger, for the building is a long way from the Custom-house and the formalities are not yet all over.

The Bey offers me a chair and asks where I come from and what my plans are. To my counter-question, what he really wants, he answers smilingly that he only wanted to inquire about me. I inform him somewhat crossly that I am thinking of catching the midday train. "What a hurry these Europeans are always in!" he says in Arabic to his servant, sighs and orders some fresh coffee.

I run back to my boxes. Everything is being sealed up. A deposit must be left and the money will be handed back to me when I cross the Egyptian frontier at Wadi Halfa. By chance I ask another official about the Customs office at Halfa and am informed that there are indeed Customs guards there but no officials. In other words, I shall never get my deposit back.

After a lot of running to and fro, they decide to make a list of my boxes with the value of each. At the Sudan frontier there will then be duty to pay only on the opened boxes. But the effendi is nowhere to be found. They look for him everywhere and finally a servant brings the news that he is sitting in the canteen having his lunch. Crude, as we Europeans are apt to be, I disturb him in the middle of a philosophical discussion and actually get him to follow me.

Everything is now in order, the deposit paid, my boxes and trunks loaded on a trolley, and we make a dash for the train. There is no time to lose. I get the tickets quickly and hand in my luggage. Covered in perspiration I rush on to the platform, only to see the last carriage of my train disappearing! The next goes at 3 p.m. and does not arrive in Cairo till nearly 6.30. It will then be too late to obtain the visa for the Sudan. That means the loss of four days, since the steamer only sails to Wadi Halfa twice a week.

It is maddening! But after all one can spend these days

pleasantly in Egypt too. I reach Cairo that evening. The usual tumult reigns at the station. At dinner in the hotel I make the acquaintance of an Egyptian, formerly Professor of Philosophy at an Italian university. He speaks twelve languages, among them Swedish. In reply to my question, how he came to learn that language, he entertains me with the following story. When he was a student at Cairo he suffered extreme poverty. He happened upon an advertisement asking for someone who could speak and write Swedish enough to translate a book into it from Arabic. He made up his mind and applied, although he did not know a word of the language. He received some money on account and began really to learn it. According to his version of the story, he did the job to the satisfaction of his employer.

On the way to Trieste I had got a mild attack of influenza, which had become worse in the cold, damp weather at sea. As I cannot expect a rapid recovery in the dust of Cairo, I proceed at once to Assuan, whose climate is warm and free from dust. The train crosses fertile country. Everything is now green—it is the beginning of January—and the corn is standing a span high. What a rich land! I want to try out my cinematograph camera at Assuan and imagine that I shall have an opportunity; the old Baedeker mentions a Bedouin village as one of the sights of the place. The Bisharin, for those are the people in question, are industrious and intelligent and enjoy a world-wide reputation as camel-breeders. Racing camels are their speciality. I hire a donkey and go without delay to their camp, which lies outside the town. We are soon there. But what a disappointment! These are Baedeker-Bisharin, who do not work but simply live on the tourists. And how they live I am soon to discover. I try to take some photos. Children and old people crowd round me, but the girls, some of whom are very pretty, flee to their tents. Accustomed to meet with a distaste for photography among Mohammedans, I at first put down their flight to religious motives. But I am

wide of the mark. The old people come to bargain with me over the baksheesh! They have a special tariff. To photograph a pretty girl costs twenty piastres! I inquire if they also dance, as I had seen interesting dances among the Bisharin near Atbara when I was there. Oh yes, a dance costs £5 sterling! I can do without such expensive pleasures and try maliciously to get near to a family idyll. My victims had noticed that I always came up to six or ten paces from them. I now change my lens and screw in my largest long-distance one (55 cm. focal distance). I prowls round the tents, photograph the curious arrangement which enables drinking water to be kept fresh and then draw closer to the people, who are watching me intently. When I am thirty steps away, the camera clicks, and before they are aware of what is happening I have secured a series of pictures. I deny myself the pleasure of filming. I ride to the dam and take several photos of that gigantic feat of modern engineering. After sunset I return with a cool north wind. The drop in temperature is a very unpleasant surprise. By day the thermometer on January 12th stands at over 86° F., at 9 p.m. it is only 54° and at five in the morning not more than 43°. Yet the climate is wonderful, the air pure and sunny. My catarrh is cured.

I must now go on to Wadi Halfa. I appear at the station, as the time-table directs, at twelve o'clock. The effendi at the platform gates tells me, with a friendly smile, that the train is unfortunately a little late and will not be in for an hour and a half. I stroll to the Nile, take a bathe and at 1.30 reappear at the station, to learn that it may require another half-hour. At last, three and a half hours late, the little train comes panting and puffing along and in twenty minutes non-stop does the seven and a half miles of my journey. Happily the steamer has waited. My luggage is stowed away quickly and amid a great hullabaloo, and the steamer sails smoothly on its way. Night falls. The full moon is reflected in the shimmering water and floods the

edges of the desert with its mysterious light. The wind has dropped and everything is wrapped in a delicious calm.

We reach Wadi Halfa punctually next day and the train takes me according to schedule to Khartoum. At the station Bedrich Machulka is waiting for me with some other members of my former expedition and he leads me to our headquarters. On my instructions he has rented a house in the native quarter of Khartoum. Here we settle in with the equipment for the expedition in two apartments and their adjoining rooms. They are well furnished and look comfortable. Only there is no place for the kitchen. But Mohammed el Amin is easy to please, as the cooks here often are, and makes shift between two walls. The space is so small that many a European cook would fill it with her body alone, but Mohammed is slim, skilful and willing, and that counts for a lot. Half an hour later, when we have only just brought all the baggage under cover, it seems to me as though I had never left Khartoum. The proprietors now look in. The landlord is a Yugo-Slav, who immigrated many years ago and married a Copt. In the Mahdi's time he remained at Omdurman and fell, together with some other Europeans, into his hands. He adopted the clothing, habits and speech of his environment and is to-day indistinguishable from the native Sudanese. The oddest thing is that he has completely forgotten his mother tongue and can now only speak Arabic. His wife is also a curiosity. Born at Omdurman and to-day a stately matron—she weighs twenty-four stone—she has never been out of Khartoum. When the Mahdists, drunk with victory, took the town and Gordon Pasha was murdered, she was a young woman and had only been married seven weeks. All the men were killed, including her first husband, whom she saw slaughtered in the most literal sense of the word before her eyes. The young woman, a beauty in those days, was assigned as part of the booty to the harem of an Emir, and there she stayed for some time as a slave. Later on she was set free by the Emir, met her present hus-

band and married him. She is very proud of her birthplace. "Here I was born, here I have lived and here will I die," she announces, striking an attitude and looking defiantly at each of us. "Here is my world. What happens elsewhere doesn't concern me." And isn't she right? What good would knowledge of the other people's world do her?

After a meal we hold a council. As I had already heard, the interesting region between the Nile and Lake Rudolf is really closed. A second plan, to cross the southern country from Darfur and push on to the Bahr el Auk, is ruled out on account of the expense: I should require several motor-cars. Eventually we decide to sail up the Nile to the south as far as the Bahr el Zeraf and the Bahr el Ghazal in a sailing-boat, which will have to be refitted for this purpose. We want to join one of the negro tribes there, the Shilluk, Dinka or Nuer, and hunt with them. Naturally the camera is to have its share too.

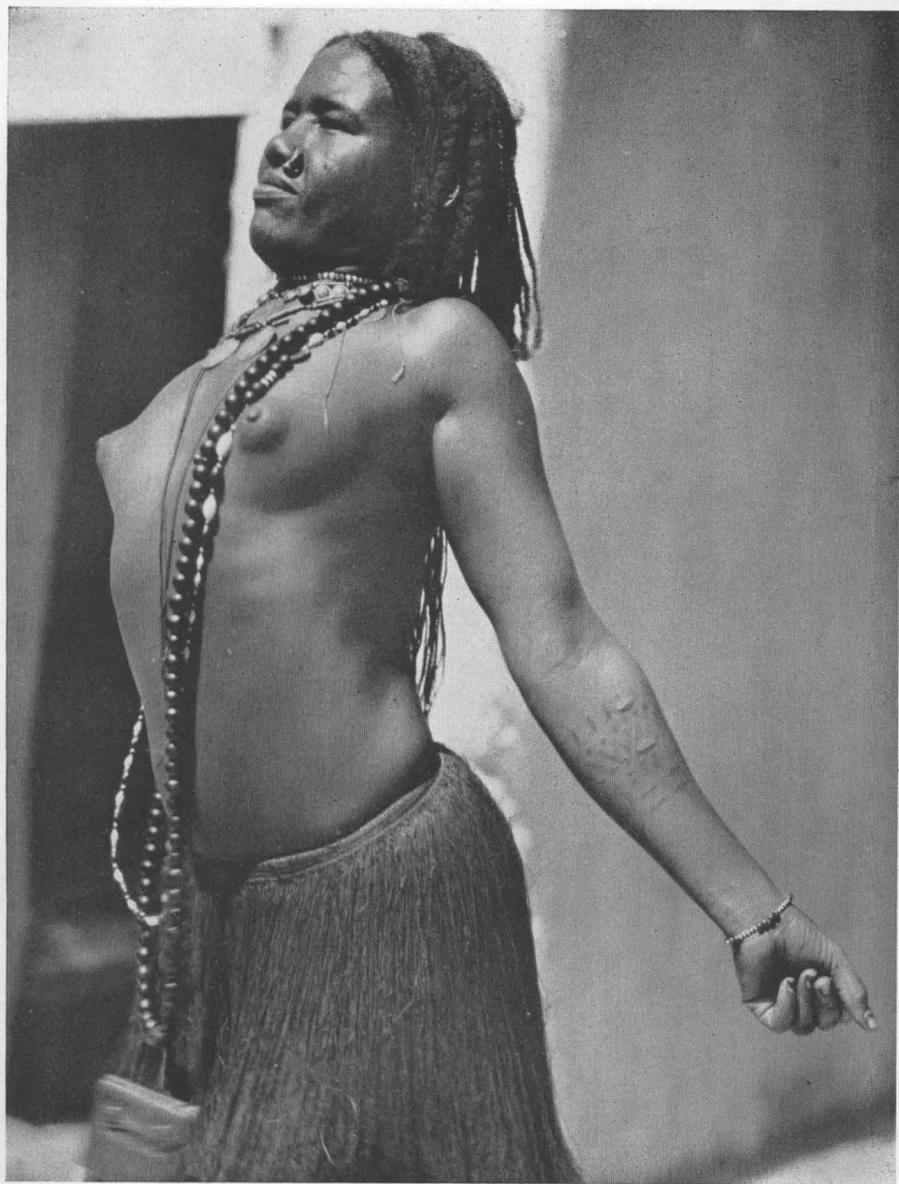
Once we have decided, we start looking for a boat. It must not be too big or we shall always be getting stuck, for we are told on every hand what a lark it is to be held up by a calm in the "South," that tangle of a million water-weeds and myriads of mosquitoes. In spite of all good advice to the contrary, I hire a sailing-boat. It is two years old and peculiarly built. It is fifteen yards long and six yards wide and has no ribs. The hull consists of short planks nailed together. Our shipbuilders would marvel if they set eyes on such a monstrosity. The wood used in building it was *sunt*, a tree which grows in the flood area of the Nile and whose roots must stand under water at least once a year if it is to flourish. Its wood is as hard as stone and proof against ants, hence its special value. The ropes are formed of palm fibre in an extremely primitive fashion. But the most remarkable feature is the sail. It is sewn together out of narrow strips of cotton manufactured by the natives, and is dirty and lavishly patched. There is still a good deal of repairing to be done before we start. The mast, also of *sunt*

wood, is put together out of several pieces and held fast on all sides by ropes. The gaff is enormously long; by way of compensation, there is no boom at all. Altogether the boat looks like a very much enlarged and heavily rigged nutshell. The crew—seven men, including the reis—make a trustworthy impression. If they can get on well with my people, we shall be able to do something.

Now we have to go to the joiner who is to undertake the rebuilding. He will have it ready in a week. God grant it! Meanwhile I turn my attention to photography and set off at once to Omdurman. Fortune favours me and a whole series of pictures are successful (Figs. 2-4), among them the extraordinary spectacle of an old man dancing to the music of drums, large and small. With his face turned up he imitates a young girl and the swaying of her hips. Here as elsewhere age is no protection against folly and the women standing by break out into loud laughter.

My negatives include types enough. What I have not got are female heads and nudes. In my book, *Typen und Tiere im Sudan*, I have described the obstacles to be overcome before one can photograph people in these parts. A nude photo is a scandal in the eyes of the natives. A girl will give herself to a stranger (and that is a rarity) ten times more readily than she will let him photograph her naked. And lectures on beauty and æsthetics cut no ice here. So I get hold of an old tippler and promise him princely baksheesh if he will help me by bringing girls before my camera. But no prostitutes. He turns up next day and advises me to try taking children for a start. If the older girls see good baksheesh earned so easily they will be certain to come along too. Very well. The attempt shall be made. He has my full authority.

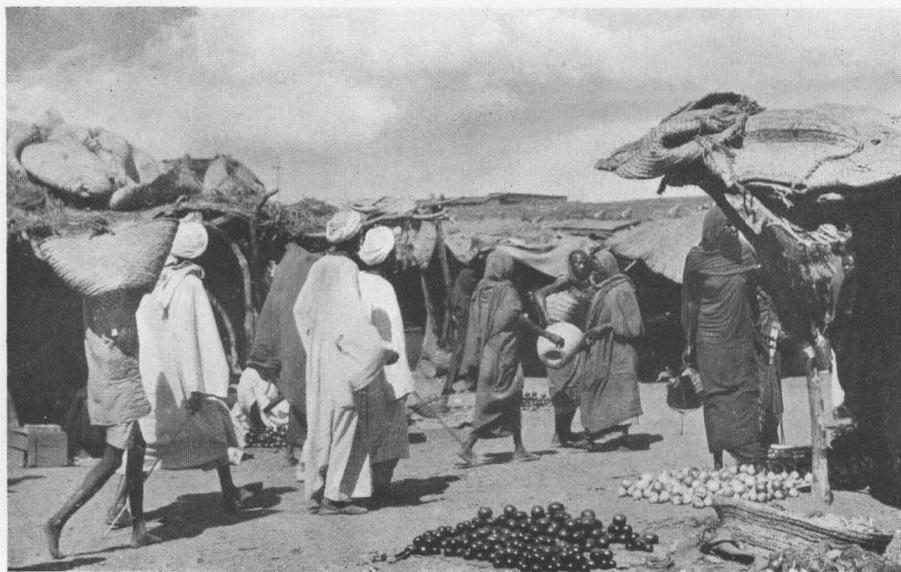
The following day Machulka has an amusing experience. As soon as he has arranged terms with the reis, the landlady pays a call. She surveys the house in amazement. It is undoubtedly much transformed, as Machulka has carefully removed the ankle-deep dirt from the rooms and the sooty



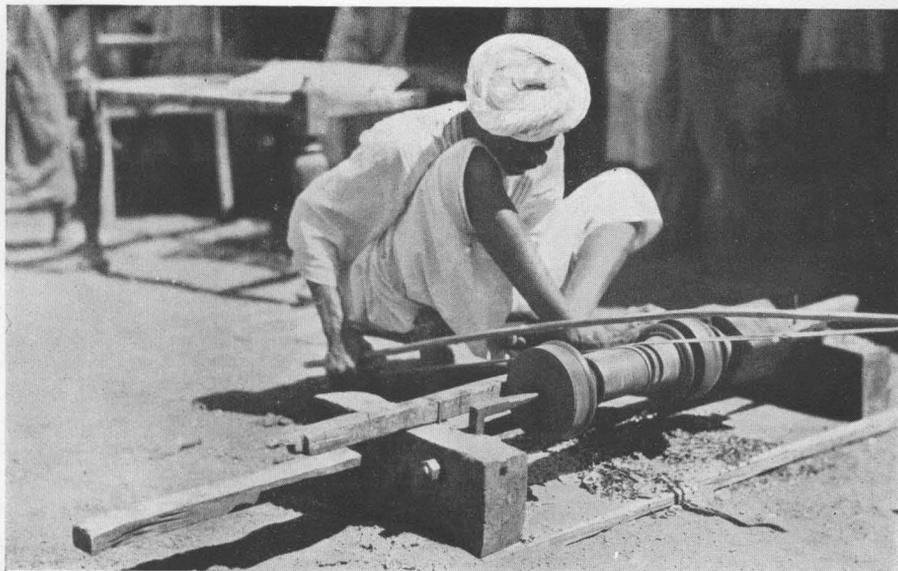
1. Sudanese dancer from Omdurman with a strong vein of negroid blood.



2. Wood market at Omdurman. Wood is dear and in great demand ; it is brought by special caravans of camels across the desert.



3. Fruit market at Omdurman. The fruit lies on the ground in front of the dealer's standing-place.



4. Turner at Omdurman. With the help of a bow his right hand sets the wood turning rapidly. The knife is pressed on the rotating material with the left hand and both feet.



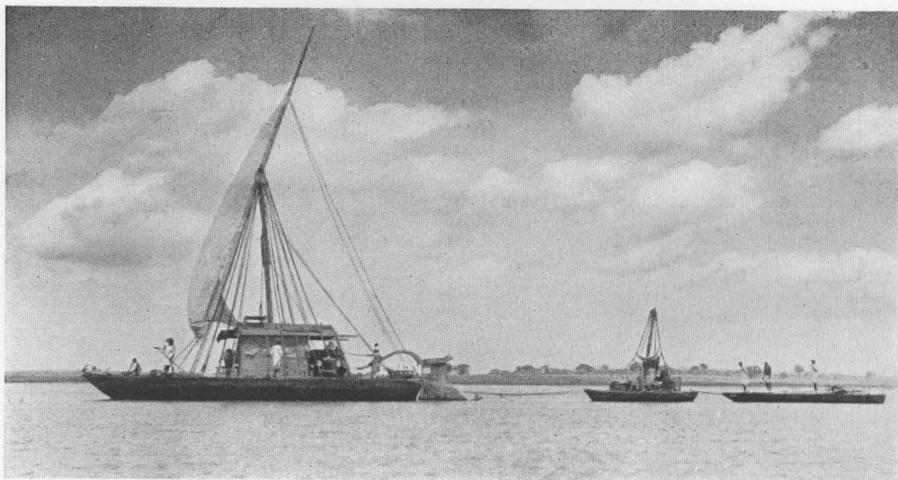
5. African cosmetics: the lips are stained blue. Pins fixed in a handle are dipped in a blue liquid and then stabbed into the lips.



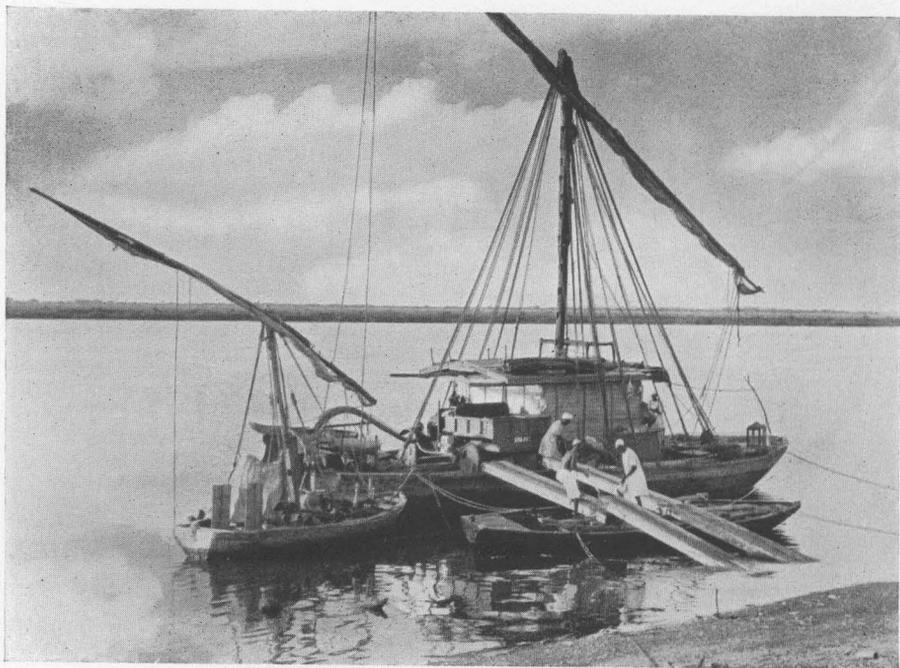
6. Sudanese girl in her house dress arranging her anklets of massive silver.



7. Sudanese *gawahzi* (dancer) performing the ancient stomach dance. Her body is wrapped in a *top* or street dress.



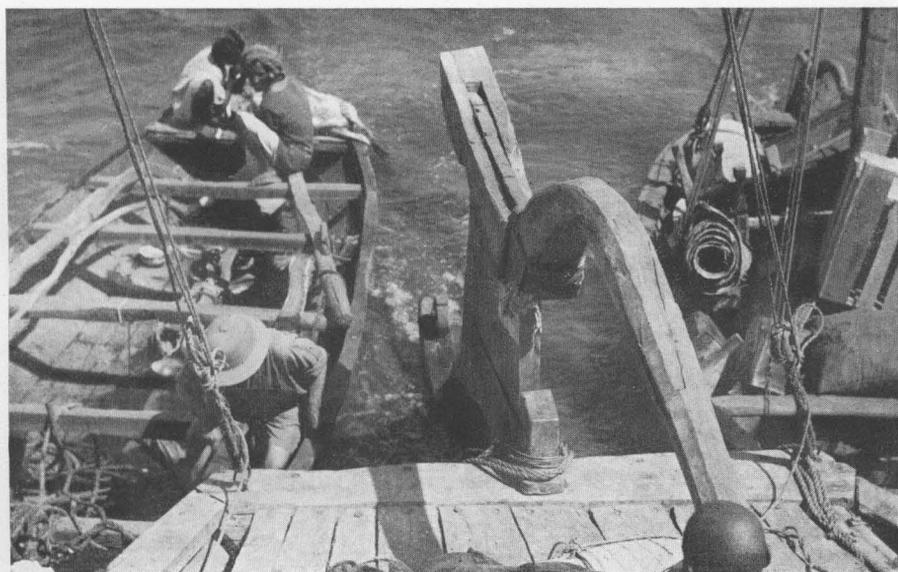
8. Departure from Khartoum. On board the sailing-boat is the cabin made of mats.



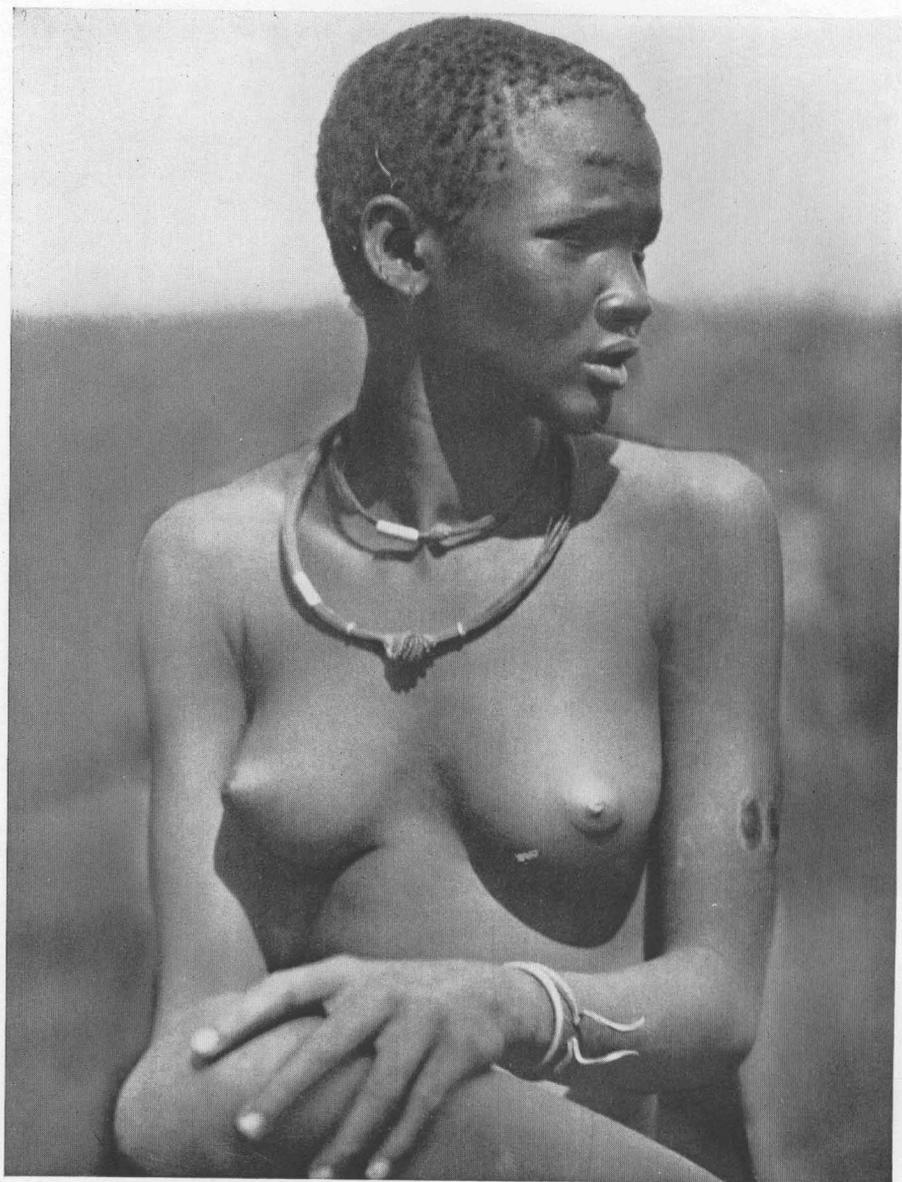
9. Loading the motor-car on to the sailing boat.



10. On the way : Gasmasid prepares the fishing tackle.



11. The two dinghies are towed.



12. Nuer girl with an iron arm-band ending in imitation of a cow's horn.

walls are now gleaming white. "Do you know," she says, quite enchanted, "you are a man in the prime of life and I have a pretty daughter. Marry her. I have always wanted such a husband as you for her." The logic is convincing and Machulka smiles obligingly. "You hesitate? Then we'll wait a bit till you know her better. Come to-morrow evening with the other *kawaga* and have a cup of coffee with us." Machulka accepts the invitation and I am delighted at an acquaintance which may perhaps lead to some good photos. Machulka, it is true, thinks it asking rather much of him to marry a girl so that I can photograph her. "She is really pretty," he says with an engaging smile, "marry her yourself."

The next day brings plenty of work on the rebuilding of the boat, so that I have to put off the visit to Machulka's "mother-in-law" to another opportunity. Instead I call on the Game Warden to ask permission to search out the Nuer people, who, I hope, are to be my future friends. The idea quite upsets him. Why do I want to leave the Nile? I shall find on its banks all the game that I can possibly covet. I explain to the Major that I am less concerned to shoot than to photograph. On the banks of the Nile, as in Europe, regular hunting has made the game purely nocturnal, so that at most one might catch them watering at twilight. This is good enough for the hunter with his long-range gun, but not for the photographer. In the interior game still appears by day. The animals go to water in the middle of the day and wander out over the wide, bare, dried-up spaces towards evening to be safe from sudden attacks by beasts of prey. The Major shakes his head, is terribly worried and tells me that the Nuer are unpleasant, ill-disposed people—you never know where you are with them—and advises me strongly against carrying out my plan. When he sees that his well-meant advice has no effect, he sighs and gives me permission to penetrate into the interior, but at most a day's journey from the banks of the Nile. It is really a piece of luck that there is no police cordon there!

Tired after this long palaver, I return home. The thermometer registers 97° F. in the shade and I need a change of clothes. I reach under the bed, pull out a shoe and suddenly feel a burning pain in my hand. I start back and discover an unusually large African scorpion which has made its home in my shoe. Just before I left Berlin, a well-known Mexican explorer had happened to tell me of an old Indian remedy for such cases, so I now apply it. To my surprise the pain actually does diminish after a few minutes. My hand swells up, but two days later there is no trace of the sting. I call to Abdullah, my suffragi, to bring a glass and the horrible creature is captured unhurt.

On the following morning the expected girls at last put in an appearance: first two, then four, then another two. The crowd grows so that I have to shut the door. I now try to film them, but the girls' movements are stiff and clumsy. As they will not be more natural, I have the scorpion quietly put down near them. All at once they see it and in no time they jump to safety with catlike agility. The first lifelike pictures are bagged!

I was thinking of buying a Ford lorry at the end of my Nile trip and visiting several interesting nomadic desert tribes and hunting steinbocks. Machulka now comes in very excited. "Why not take the lorry with us at once?" he says. "That's all very well, but where are we to house it and how are we to get it ashore?" I turn his idea over in my mind, however, and come to the conclusion that it is practicable. The cabin will indeed have to be rebuilt and a handy little erection alongside it will have to go, but that is quite feasible. Then it occurs to me that in that case my people would not have enough room to sleep in. There is only one solution: to hire a large rowing-boat and tow it. Several men could sleep in it at night along with the petrol.

Next morning I go to Ford's agents to buy a car. A native in the shop tells me that the manager is still at breakfast and I must wait a bit. I learn from the manager that he un-

fortunately has not a lorry in stock, but that the steamer with the cars is three weeks overdue. They are expecting it for certain in two or three days.

One day I have an experience which reveals the queer mentality of Europeans in the East. I visit a variety show, one of several that manage to maintain themselves in Khar-toum. Some new Greek dancing girls are advertised, so the place is full. A number of superior natives have come; the rest of the audience are white—Greeks, Levantines, Syrians, Englishmen, Italians—all mixed up together and looking forward to the rare pleasure of the evening. The dancers appear. They are old, ugly and worn-out. They are nevertheless received with tumultuous applause. Their performance is very fifth-rate and I expect to see them hissed. Not a bit of it. The onlookers not only clap and stamp, they bombard them with ten-piastre pieces. In my astonishment I look at my neighbours and recognise among them a lot of small tradespeople who for years have been saving every penny in order to return home one day. These people are now, as if hypnotised, literally throwing their money away by the pound without getting anything for it.

Next day more girls come to see me. They have brought the necessaries to paint their lips, a collection of pins fixed close together into a wooden handle. Lip painting is by no means the simple affair here that it is in Europe. The pins are dipped in a blue liquid and the lips pricked with them till they are sore (Fig. 5). An excellent dancer also arrives, one of the few *gawahzi*, a class who live by their art. This profession was formerly held in high esteem. People came from a distance to marvel at one of these artistes. She dances in a *rahat* (apron), with the upper part of her body naked (Fig. 1). Nowadays the art of the *gawahzi* is dying out. The *sharamit* (prostitutes) take pains to copy them, but a girl must be born a *gawahzi* and not a *sharmuta* (prostitute) if she is really to master the art. The *gawahzi* performs the aboriginal stomach dance, such as I had seen before. But

what a difference! While she is dancing and all her muscles are in motion she bends backwards nearly to the ground. Her long plaited hair sweeps the ground. Every muscle of the well-built, supple body is tense. In these strictly stylised and regulated movements the relics of ancient Egyptian dancing have been preserved to us.

Then there is a mother waiting for me with her child, who is due to be tattooed with the emblem of his tribe—an interesting process which I should like to photograph. Cuts are first of all made in the skin of the cheeks with a sharp knife, according to the practice of the child's tribe. Then an extract, composed of salt-petre, ashes, shatta and various herbs, is rubbed into the wounds. After a few days the cuts swell up and then heal slowly. Broad unerasable scars remain behind as a badge, those marks so strikingly characteristic of the Sudanese. The mother, by the way, is not bad-looking. Although poor she takes care of her appearance. Her hands even, though they tell of work, are adorned according to custom with orange-coloured patches. For this purpose henna leaves are dried, ground to powder, mixed with water and cooked to a thick paste. This is applied to the places to be stained, particularly the flat of the hand and the nails. The hand is then wrapped up and remains in bandages the whole night. Next morning it is ablaze with charming colours.

The Ford cars that had been announced actually arrive punctually. An extraordinary land this Africa! Everywhere unpunctuality, even among the Europeans. Yet here is a motor dealer who delivers the goods promptly. In Europe itself such a thing is unheard of! I am delighted and go to choose a lorry. Unfortunately the chassis of the lorries are too big for the sailing-boat, while the body of the cars would be useless for our mass of luggage. I ask the joiner, who has really rebuilt the sailing-boat very well, if he could possibly construct a wooden body for a car. He swears by the Prophet's beard that he can. He takes four days to produce

it and then delivers one which is solid and thoroughly well made for our purpose.

In the meantime we have got hold of a second small boat in which to stow the petrol. My flotilla now comprises one large sailing-boat, one small sailing-boat and a rowing-boat. My glance wanders to the motor lorry. With means of transport we are certainly well provided. We move in amid plenty of shouting and arrange ourselves as well as we can in our new quarters. There is not much space, but we do not need more. My apparatus is laid out in neat rows under my bed. In the corner, ready for use, is my cinema camera on its stand. The rifles hang on the wall, and near my bed is the chest containing my linen. Three men will sleep on the roof of the cabin, the others on deck and in the rowing-boat, packed together like herrings. Last of all, with tense excitement on all hands, the car is brought on board (Fig. 9) and placed alongside the cabin. Despite the gloomy prophecies of the reis this is also carried out successfully.

We set sail early in the best of spirits (Fig. 8). A stiff breeze is blowing from the north and carries the large, heavily-rigged nutshell gaily up-stream. We make excellent headway, almost eight miles an hour. Our primitive craft does more, it seems, than we had expected. The next day goes by with a good wind. The banks of the Nile are cultivated and everywhere the fields are irrigated. A beautiful night follows the brilliant sunset, but even so I do not allow the voyage to be interrupted. I want to reach Malakal as speedily as possible; only there can we decide which direction to choose. The natives come from a distance to market and we shall be able to find out all that is worth knowing about the position of game, water conditions and the like. We run aground several times and it takes a lot of very ticklish work in the overpowering heat to get the ship afloat again.

Once I take a dip, swim agreeably across the Nile from bank to bank and climb refreshed into the rowing-boat. The scenery changes gradually. Small islands of ambach

extend far out into the river, tongues of land are overgrown with papyrus and one comes upon the wonder plant, mimosa, everywhere.

Everyone who had travelled in these parts had told us of thousands of cranes which we should begin to meet two days' journey from Khartoum. I was looking forward to photographing these beautiful birds and had decided to devote two or three days to it at some favourable spot. But of these thousands of cranes there is not a trace; we only see a few dozen in the whole course of our trip. The sand-banks are deserted. What can have caused these birds to alter the direction of their flight? Change of climate? Storms in Europe? We do not know. On the islands that look as if they were made for a rich bird life, a few grey herons are fishing. A solitary egret is asleep among a mob of spoonbills and two brown glossy ibises are digging for insects in the mud of the river bank. A sea-eagle (Fig. 13) up a tree utters his ringing bell-like call. Now begins the Africa that I love, where every bush and animal breathes calm and a deep peace. Night falls, the raucous scream of two tardy cranes resounds from the sky above. Thousands of frogs and crickets fill the air with melodious noises. Here and there a puff of wind bears the smell of marsh and damp earth to us. We are sailing to the south.