

CHAPTER VII

We leave the swampy region—Ants on board—Malakal—When will there be negro sanctuaries?—Northwards—Past Fashoda—Kaka—The Nazir of the Aulad Hamid—Cattle riders—A good buffalo hunt—A *karama*—The rainy season begins: sand-storms and thunder—Khartoum again—Farewell—Homewards—“Que voulez-vous, c'est l'Europe”—“Gari-Gari.”

THE White Nile bears us once more northwards. One clear evening we put the ambach raft into the water, I paddle far out and let myself drift down-stream along the bank. It is so calm that the voices of the birds ring out loudly across the water. Little sedge-dwellers come within arm's reach. I surprise a large crocodile asleep on the bank and glide silently by at a few yards' distance. All at once I am wakened from my reverie. The river has taken a bend and the bellow of a hippopotamus, incredibly loud in the silence, resounds quite close to me. I have drifted into the middle of a hippo family. The old bull comes roaring towards me so that, unarmed as I am, I have no choice but to disappear as quickly as possible among the reeds. During the night a troop of driver ants descend upon the sailing-boat and put the men to flight. These creatures are a veritable plague in Africa. They roam about at night in armies a yard wide that sometimes stretch out of sight. They march over every obstacle and kill every living thing that gets in their way. It even happens that large domestic animals, donkeys and horses, for instance, which are tied up and cannot escape, perish in a short time under the mass of insects. If you encounter one of these armies or are surprised by it at night, your only salvation is to take to your heels.

The boat is soon lying at anchorage in Malakal. I am very kindly received by the Governor. He is one of the old brigade and was an active colleague of Slatin Pasha. He knows the Arabs thoroughly, was for a long time head of the Intelligence Department at Khartoum and has only recently been transferred to Malakal as Governor. I hear the missionary bishop has given orders to aim at getting the Shilluk to abandon their original hair-dress and tribal marks. The Governor was requested to introduce compulsory schooling among the negroes and force them by means of ordinances to give up their picturesque cloak in favour of shirt and trousers. Fortunately for the negroes the Governor is an old African with a heart for his protégés. "Shall I make them wear clothes, so that these fellows who are now healthy and free from vermin, thanks to sleeping in wood ash, shall make the acquaintance of lice and bugs like the Sudanese? And all those diseases that are carried by vermin and so far seldom trouble the negroes?" But suppose his successor does not listen to him? For animals sanctuaries have already been established which are a model to all nations, but men are to be robbed of their special characteristics and their freedom! Are old things only to be preserved when there is nothing left to preserve? The Shilluk country would be the very place for a reserve, for this proud people's habits and costume can only be taken away by force.

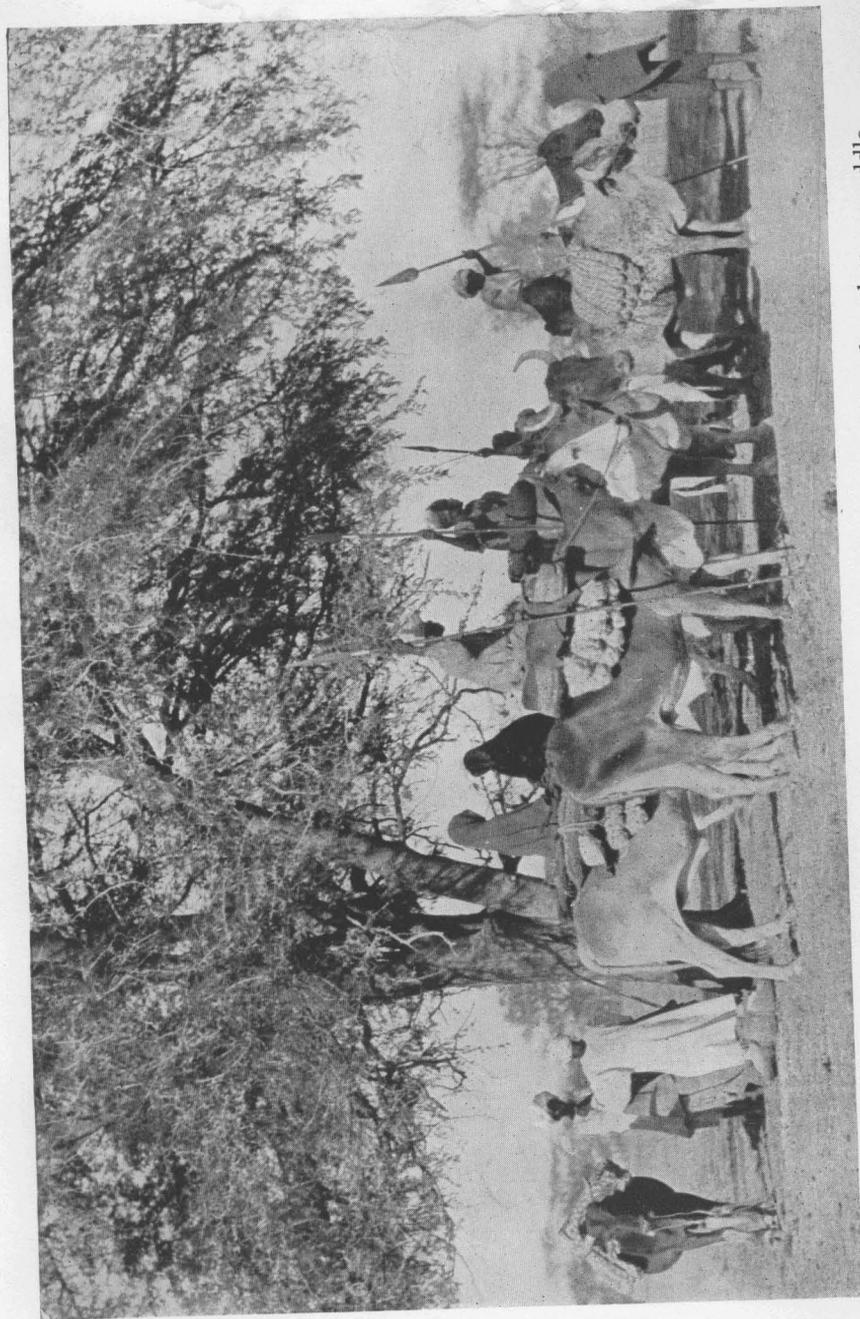
Another little story was told us which is typical of the present Governor. An Arab merchant had entered the Nuer country in a sailing-boat. He did all kinds of business and eventually sailed on secretly, but with a girl to whom he had taken a fancy, without paying any bride-price as the custom of the land demands. The natives brought an action against him at Malakal and the Governor compelled the merchant to submit to the jurisdiction of the Nuer and pay the fine, in the shape of several cows, which the Sheikh imposed upon him.



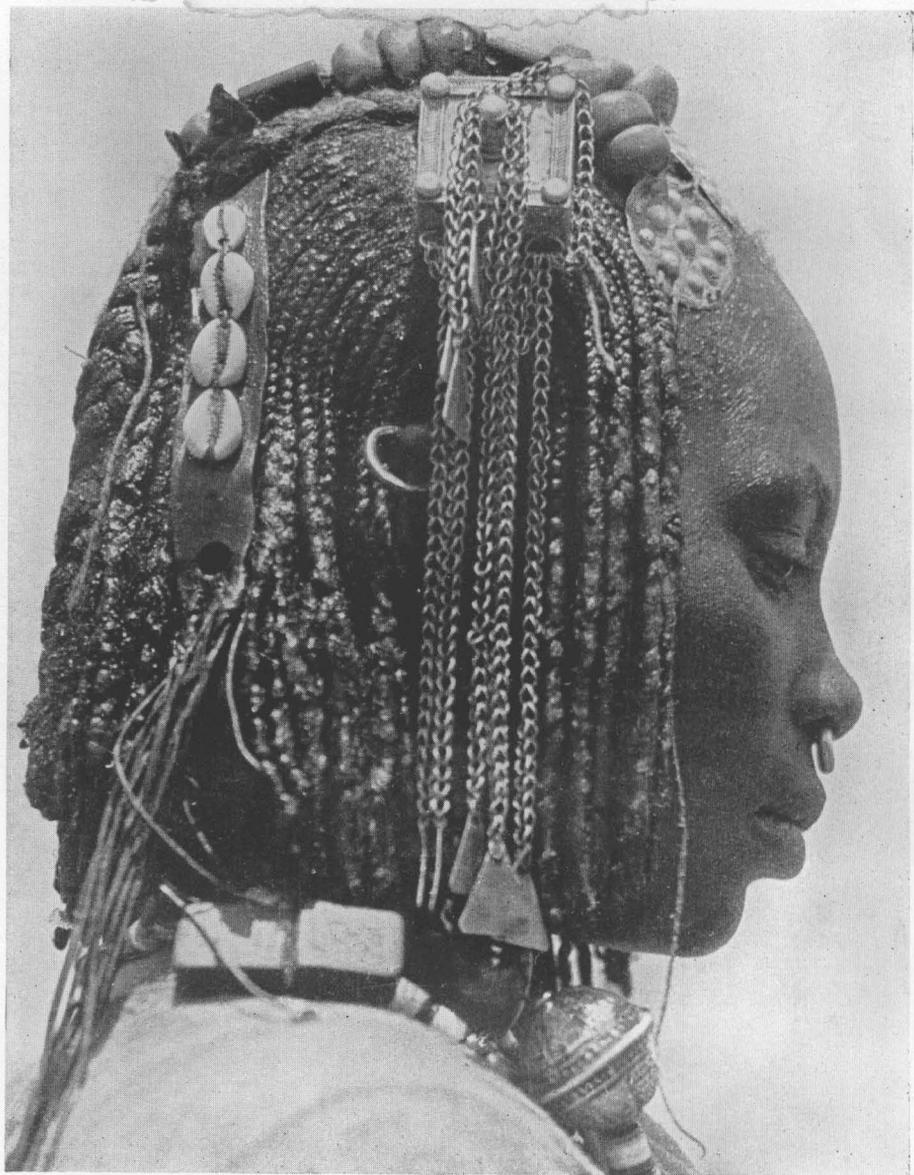
106. Nuba jester with a marabou skull on his head.



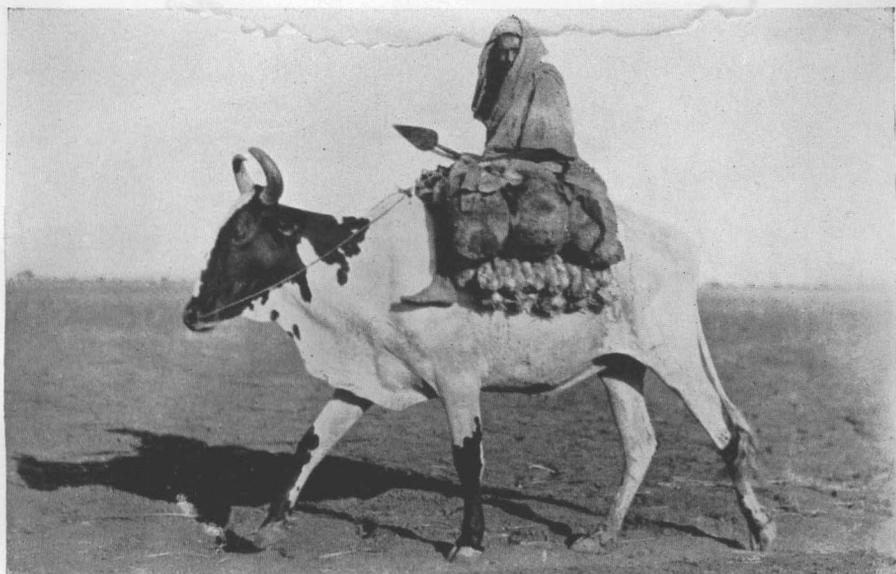
107. Arab riding sports near Talodi. The riders wear ancient wrought-chain shirts.



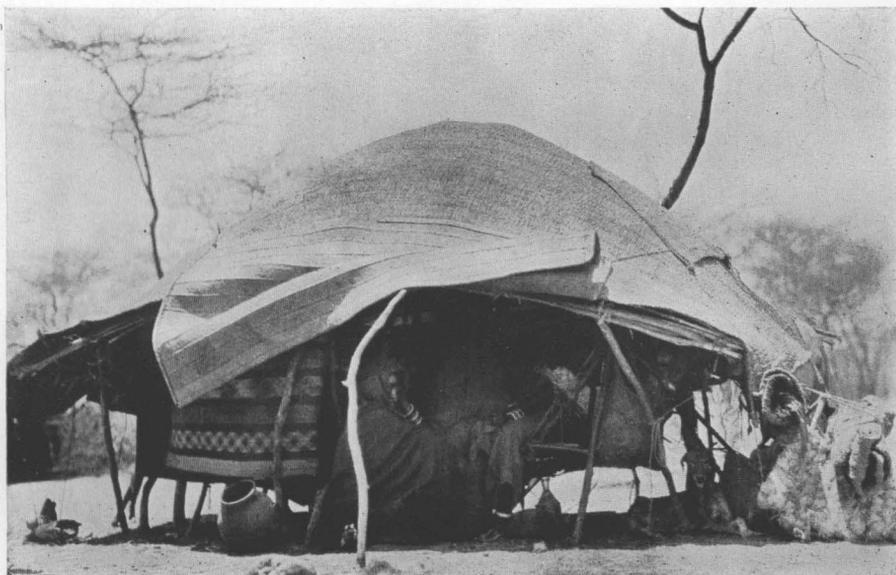
108. Aulad Hamid Arabs under an acacia. They ride cattle with a broad straw saddle.



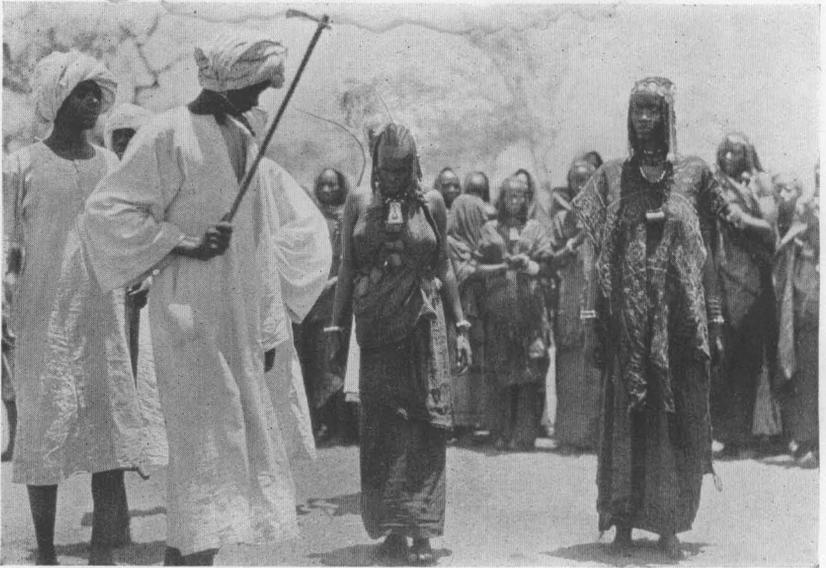
109. Aulad Hamid girl with valuable head ornaments of gold, silver, amber and cowrie shells.



110. An Aulad Hamid warrior on his steed.



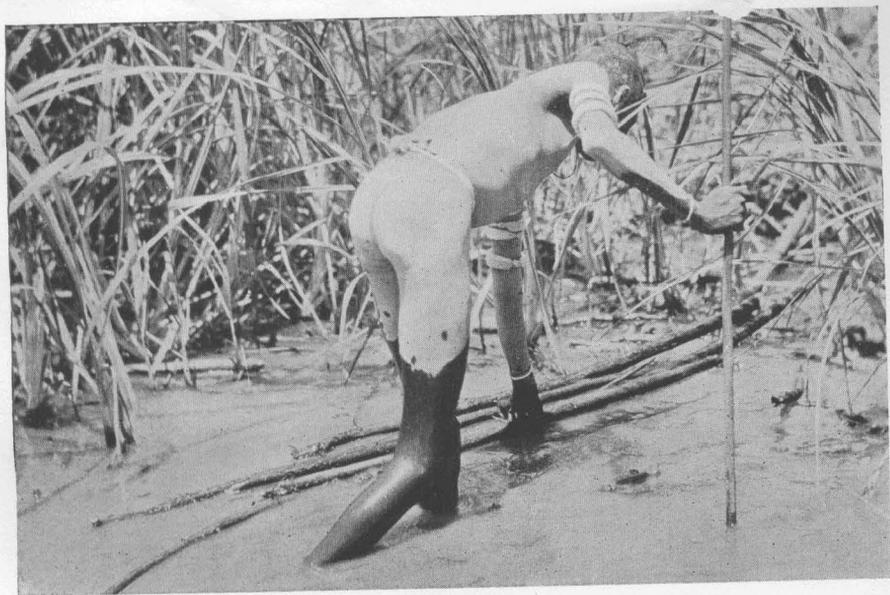
111. Tent of Aulad Hamid Arabs, consisting of a framework of poles with fine, woven palm-leaf mats stretched across them, some of them beautifully painted in various colours.



112. Aulad Hamid dance.



113. Aulad Hamid Arab women making themselves up for the dance. They are not veiled like the Sudanese. The dresses are of heavy silk, the ornaments of precious metals, ivory and ostrich feathers.



114. Nuer and Dinka rub themselves with wood ash as a protection against gnat stings. The legs of the Dinka who has stepped into the water now look like black boots.



115. Northern Dinka. The warrior Shau Maik has taken the spear-head off the shaft and is using it as a knife.



116. The last Dinka warrior stands with his thin legs on a termite hill and gazes after our disappearing boat.

We go on. The sun sets, blood red, and the silhouettes of the tall trees are mirrored black and gloomy in the water. In addition there is a *murrah* of the Shilluk! A large camp fire throws its gleam far and wide. Heaps of dried cowdung are smoking. The blue smoke creeps over the ground and envelops man and beast in an undulating mantle which contrasts strangely with the firmament. The outlines of heads and spears are alone visible. The first quarter of the waxing moon shines in the sky. Ahead of us stands the Pole Star. We are travelling northwards.

One night we hear crashing on the bank. "A hippo," says Machulka. "If not an elephant," I answer in fun. The noise increases. We take our glasses and clearly recognise some twenty large elephants which have come to the Nile to quench their thirst. The white ivory glistens in the moonlight. Some of the huge creatures have climbed the slope of the bank and are waving their mighty heads from side to side. Every minute one of them lifts his trunk and sniffs. Although everything is silent on board, they are soon aware of us; a barely noticeable breath of air is blowing towards the bank. All at once the crashing ceases and the herd quietly collects. The animals stand stock-still as if lost in thought. Then the leader begins to wander slowly towards the wood. Without a sound, though they are treading on dry, brittle grass, the herd follows in a long train. Looking like ghosts they disappear silently with swaying steps.

Another disappointment! The nomad Arabs have not stopped at Kaka but gone far into Northern Kordofan. We have given up hope of seeing cattle riders, the Arab *bagara*, when a merchant brings news that the Nazir of the Aulad Hamid happens to be a guest at a *ferik* (camp) of his tribe. The Aulad Hamid are a large tribe which once upon a time migrated from Arabia into the Sudan and were ruled by powerful Sultans. The leaders of the tribe still have great influence and the Government actually puts

policemen at their disposal. The present head Prince of the Aulad Hamid is El Rhadi Kambal Nazir el Aulad Hamid, and it is to him that the merchant is going to take us. The *ferik* lies about thirty miles from Kaka on the ancient caravan route to Rashad. There are several wells there. Wild boars are said to have shown people the water and the place was therefore named Id el Haluf (swine's ground water). All the caravans are obliged to make a halt there, and it is at such places that one has a chance of gaining some insight into the character of the people. Our way leads across wooded steppe and a number of guinea-fowl and gazelles cross our path. Once at the well, we find a caravan of cattle just about to go further (Fig. 108). Each animal carries a saddle with a thick straw covering to which the packs are buckled, and high on top the riders sit enthroned (Fig. 110). Several pretty, fair-skinned Arab girls are among them, with their hair richly ornamented (Fig. 109). The *ferik* lies not far from the well. As we arrive the women all disappear into the large, flat tents (Fig. 111). A fence of thorn surrounds the camp in a wide circle. The Nazir comes towards us with great dignity, accompanied by the elders of the *ferik*. Among his followers are pure Arab types. The next thing is to pull oneself together and try to return the overwhelming Arab politeness. First of all the Prince embraces our guide. They were friends in youth and belong to the same tribe. Then it is our turn. The hand is given several times, being laid on the breast between-whiles, and I reel off the five Arab formulas of greeting that I have painfully learnt. Then come the dignitaries. A full half-hour is spent exchanging the first courtesies. Meanwhile two seats have been brought. Carpets are spread upon them and Machulka and I take our places opposite the Nazir and the merchant. We proceed with the etiquette. At first we must conceal the purpose of our visit: custom and decency demand it. All group themselves unconstrainedly in three circles according to rank in

order to hear the conversation. The innermost circle is composed of the Nazir, his friend and ourselves, the two *kawaga*. Behind us some twenty persons of position squat on the ground, and outside them the poorer people and the slaves. The women are inquisitive and try to watch us from the tents. After we have inquired after the health of the Nazir and his tribe, I express a rather obvious interest in cattle-breeding and hope that the rain will come. The Nazir in return asks after the motor-car, our journey and so forth. It transpires that we are the first *kawaga*, apart from the English inspectors, whom he has met in his land. After a great deal of palaver we at last come to the point of our visit. The Nazir is most accommodating and promises that the girls shall dance the following day. We offer a sheep as a present. Next morning at eight we are to come again.

On our way there we overtake a caravan winding tortuously through a thorny acacia wood. At a turn of the road I halt, set up my camera and wait. Gasmasid runs busily to and fro with a long stick in his hand. We pretend to be a squad of surveyors! The trick works: the Arabs, who know nothing of filming, pass calmly and unsuspectingly on their way. We manage to use this dodge three times and then we visit the Nazir. Once again the greetings last an eternity. We learn that the girls were there at eight in the morning but have since gone home as we were delayed by photographing the caravan. We must wait. Twelve o'clock has passed when the belles appear with their partners and the drums. Most of the girls are very originally decorated (Fig. 113). It is evident that they have learnt a thing or two from the neighbouring negroes, but their dancing is poor in comparison. The remarkable rhythm in all the movements and the fine sense of tune which had compelled our admiration are utterly lacking in the Arab dancers (Fig. 112). Finally, the heat puts an end to the dance and we wander through the camp past the flat tents, which are made of closely woven mats with cloths hanging over the

entrance (Fig. 111). Women are peeping out everywhere. The Nazir leads us to some straw huts which he has erected for passing friends. Eggs and milk are brought; our host apologises for not being able to entertain us worthily as he is himself a guest here and his herds are grazing many days' journey away in the west. We enjoy a rest after the meal, then we return to the *ferik* and the leave-taking begins. My presents are brought—sugar, tea, coffee and the like. Whereas the negro Sheikhs always inspect the gifts at once and almost regularly try to get something more, the pride of the Arabs forbids any such procedure. The Nazir barely honours the presents with a glance, but expresses his thanks and assures us that had we visited his camp he would have been able to detain us for at least three weeks.

At Kaka the merchant informs us that a Dinka Sheikh and his son are prepared to show us a good buffalo ground. The two Dinka, Shau Maik and Gau Nyok, are very active and clever and set off at once to explore. They are soon back and report that both buffaloes and elephants are about.

Long before sunrise we are after the buffaloes. Two Dinka from an adjoining settlement have joined us. As our hunting ground is not famed for buffaloes, there has never been a hunting expedition here. The two negroes imagine, therefore, that they have to do with a *mufetish*. As the local Commissioner is exceptionally popular and has a complete command of the Dinka language, the people are very favourable to Europeans. In a quite exemplary manner they lead us towards the game. At first I am a little anxious because they do not follow the spoor but hurry through the wood so quickly that one can scarcely keep up. Suddenly our guides stop and point to some thick bushes. The buffaloes pass here, they say. There is no view over the country. The grass stands five feet high and is dotted with stout thorns. Dark shapes appear behind them. I have gone forward and sit motionless behind a bush. A gazelle, driven

off by the buffaloes, comes straight towards me but, catching sight of me at three yards' distance, springs away. For a moment the dusky mass in the background remains still, then crash and they are in full flight. We pursue them hour after hour. Suddenly the Dinka halt again: "The buffaloes will pass here, by this bush." Having never hunted with a European they lead me as though I were armed not with a gun, but with a spear. While I am crouching behind the bush and waiting for the buffaloes it occurs to me that they have gone with the wind the whole time. It would therefore have been useless to follow their tracks. I understand the Dinka. After a while I start up—the dark wall appears again on the other side of the bushes and moves slowly in my direction. My gun is cocked and aimed. I can distinguish the great heads with their menacing horns. Ahead of the others comes a fat old cow with horns exceptionally wide apart. The interval between us diminishes rapidly. The grass hides their flanks and I try in vain to find a bull among them. Thirty, twenty paces. The grass rustles and dry wood crackles under my weight. Twelve paces before me lies a small patch free of grass, which the leading cow now treads with upraised head. It sniffs. A noble sight, this formidable buffalo in the wilderness almost within arm's reach. A jump to one side and at once they all lift their heads and look at me. Although I do not so much as move an eyelash, they take to flight the next moment. Near as I was, I had not been able to pick out one bull; the front rank of cows had covered the animals behind them. Again the chase goes on for hours in the scorching heat. Tiang, horse antelopes and gazelles cross our path, but we hold our course undeterred with our eyes fixed on some trees on the horizon. Four hundred yards from them we pause. "Will the buffaloes come this way?" I ask. "No, they will probably want to sleep under the trees." It is quite true; barely ten minutes have passed before they show themselves in the direction indicated. We

wait a good hour and then I go forward. The ground is covered with dry grass; not a tree or a bush to screen me. At first I have to go on all-fours, then creep on my stomach over thorns and thistles, till after two hours I am fifty steps from the animals and crouching behind a tussock. Four cows are on the look-out, including my old acquaintance with the spreading horns; the others have settled down in the shade of the trees and are asleep. I lay my gun across my knee and take a rest. My heart, still weak from illness, is beating rapidly and irregularly. I wait for half an hour and then whistle. The animal has spotted me. Instantly they are all on their feet. A splendid bull stands up beside the leading cow. I raise my gun, but at the very moment when I fire, the cow turns round, covering the bull's shoulder for a fraction of a second, receives the bullet, and falls. The rest have fled a little way and are standing on a patch of dried-up grass. They gaze in surprise at the leader lying still on the ground. I have time for another shot. The bull, though hit, runs with the herd but soon drops behind and turns aside. The others stop and look at him. A second bull follows him, at first hesitatingly, then at a gallop, but the wounded one plods on slowly. The unhurt bull runs up close to him, scents in his direction and gallops back. Then the whole herd go after him, surround him and dash madly away with him in the middle of them. But the noble creatures can do nothing; their comrade is too badly injured. He is really finished. The herd wait once more, but then gallop away when they see me hurrying up. I manage to run up behind the wounded bull, which is still dragging himself along, till I am within a hundred yards of him. He notices me and stops. He turns round, raises his head and stamps with his right hoof. I advance cautiously with my gun in readiness. It is an unforgettable scene—the ferocious giant drawing himself up for battle. With bleeding eyes he attacks. But the distance is too

great and the bare ground a handicap. My bullet finishes him. He jumps once or twice, then collapses and a deep bellow announces the approach of death. It is all over. Genuine regret seizes me as I stand beside his carcass. How much rather would I have photographed him! Unfortunately in this country so overrun with grass it is out of the question. The buffalo is a capital specimen, quite old, with huge horns covered with resin like those of old deer at home. We now proceed to skin the animal. I return with one guide to the cattle pen to inform the Dinka, while the other three keep watch by the booty. We are fiercely punished for going without water-bottles. We have pushed on much further into the interior than we had intended and the water-bags are empty. This return journey over scorching, cracked ground in the terrible heat, without water, fagged out and scratched, is something I shall never forget. Even the Dinka drags one foot laboriously after the other. The hours go by with maddening slowness before we at last reach the village, quite done in and indifferent to everything. They bring us a *burma* (round vessel) holding some five quarts of bitter, foul-tasting water and we empty it greedily. Then we stumble painfully to the boat while the natives go off to fetch the heads, skins and meat of the booty. That night we rest from our exertions and in the morning visit the Dinka village. It consists of but one cattle pen and a few *tukul* for the herdsmen. The tribe live in the interior and the young men drive the cattle to the Nile during the dry season when the water evaporates in the khors. Although we are in the village by sunrise, the cattle are already away. The ropes are hanging on pegs and only sheep and goats are reposing in the enclosure. Whereas the Nuer and the Shilluk leave their cattle till eight o'clock in the pen and only drive them to graze after they have been milked, the Dinka do the opposite. The cattle are let out before sunrise. Only the calves remain

tied up, so that they shall not be able to drink the milk. Towards nine the herd comes back. The cows are now milked and later driven out again to graze. The Dinka, like the Nuer, blow for all they are worth into the anus and vagina of the cows which have no calves but are still expected to give milk. It is an odd sight.

The evening is drawing on when a small troop of Dinka warriors appear and deliver buffalo heads and skins. The meat is distributed. We then go on to Meshrah Zeraf. During the afternoon the sky blackens over in a threatening manner. Heavy storms are hanging in the north and west. Towards evening the wind freshens and veers to the east. During the night the storm breaks. Happily the water at the landing-place is deep enough for the boats to be tied fast to the bank, or the storm would have driven us on land. Suddenly the wind drops. In the bright light of the moon we see a black wall approaching. Sheet lightning flashes unceasingly from it. A thick white mist is bearing down upon us before the dark wall. All at once the storm rips this veil in shreds and scatters it. The glare of the lightning reveals a mass of white foam advancing. It is the waves of the Nile, whipped up by the hurricane and threatening to engulf us. We are in the grip of a typhoon, such as often occurs here at this time of year. Then farewell boats and equipment; we cannot hope to do more than escape with our bare lives. Now it is upon us. In the tumult of the elements not a word can be heard. The storm catches the boat broadside and lifts us on to the land. Although it struck the Nile laterally and the water is therefore not so furiously churned up as it might have been, one wave after another breaks over us. Foam and spray lash the roof of the wooden cabin. A cloud-burst opens its sluices. The cabin looks like being carried away. The heavy *nuger* is tossed about like a rowing-boat on the swell of the North Sea. Everyone hangs on to the beams, shivering with

cold. Clad in my bathing drawers I go to see after the two little boats. The tempest is still so violent that I have to clutch the rigging with all my strength. The rowing-boat has sunk, the little sailing-boat is full and the gaff broken. The petrol tins are just visible above the water. It is now or never. By straining every nerve we at last succeed in saving the boat with its precious cargo. The storm rages the whole night long. A dull morning dawns. Heavy rain-clouds are still hanging low. The wind is too wild for us to sail, and in any case we have our hands full to repair the damage. Although no one has had a wink of sleep we are all in good spirits after surviving the danger. The men sing and bandy jokes. Some Dinka have come to pay us a farewell visit. One has been hunting the crocodiles with his spear and, after quenching his thirst, busies himself in the water. His legs, washed clean of the white wood ash, look like black boots (Fig. 114). Before long the wind lessens and regretfully I watch the hunting ground with the tall figures of the Dinka disappearing on the horizon (Fig. 116).

The storm has ushered in the rainy season and a stiff south wind carries the boat before it at a great speed. Everywhere the abdim storks are beginning to build their nests (Fig. 81). We are still in the Bagara country. A small island in the middle of the Nile induces us to make a short halt. In an airy *zeriba* made of *um suf* I wait with my cameras for the birds which had thronged the island the evening before, and hardly is the sun up when numerous small ducks arrive together with spoonbills. Later on pelicans and several kinds of stork join them, then an Egyptian goose in company with an Egyptian ibis. Once again I am the happy observer of an unforgettable idyll on the mud bank. The birds hunt, preen themselves, look for food and seem to exchange news. From the other side come crocodiles. Slowly and carefully they approach, climb

out on the bank and sun themselves with their jaws wide open. Sandpipers and stork-stilts play around them. The little creatures are no more frightened of the terrifying jaws than are the Nessyt storks which look for their food in the mud shoulder to shoulder with the crocodiles. Some of these bold pygmies even run about on the giants as though they were logs. My time is unfortunately limited and I can hardly give more than two hours to the charming idyll. I come out of my hiding-place. The birds rise screaming and the crocodiles disappear. Here and there something black and narrow peeps out of the water: they have their eyes on the disturber of their peace.

After various adventures, such as cloud-bursts and sandstorms, we reach Khartoum. My expedition is over. The train conveys me rapidly towards the north. At my side sits a young Frenchman who tells me something of his life. He is returning prematurely from an expedition. Relatives hand in hand with "good business friends" have taken advantage of his absence to rob him of his good name and position in industrial concerns that he himself had founded. He is hurrying northwards to give and demand an account. "Can you imagine a negro capable of such shabbiness?" he asks emphatically. "Mais voyez, ça c'est l'Europe." I am forced to agree that I too often prefer all the unpleasantness and dangers of Africa to dealings with some civilised people. But what is the use of such reflections? The burdensome, acquisitive labours of a European will soon have drawn me back into their eddy.

I have spent many months far away from European culture in union with the vivacious members of those tribes whom we, over-civilised as we are, call primitive. The charm of such a life is great. I have hardly set foot in Egypt when I begin to feel homesick for my handsome, long, thin Nuer friends' cry of greeting: "Gari-Gari." It rings in my ear like the ancient cry of the wilderness.

The train thunders over a bridge. Far below me I see

for the last time the sluggish water of the Bahr el Azrak flowing slowly and irresistibly northwards. *Whoever has drunk the water of the Nile returns*, runs the age-old proverb. Shall I ever again see the Sudan, that land of peace whose broiling sun can kill indeed, but can also miraculously heal the mind and soul?

