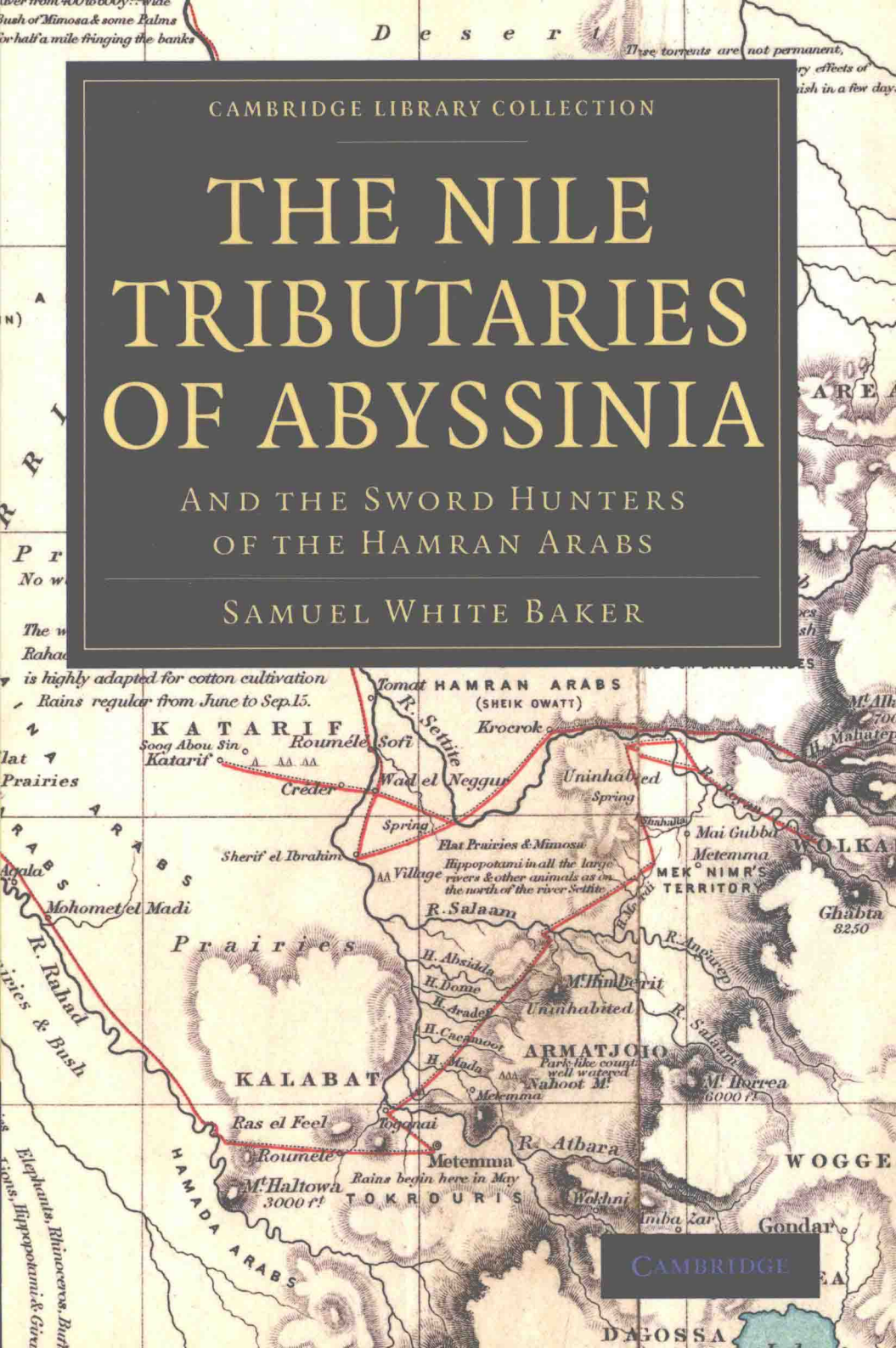


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# The Nile Tributaries of Abyssinia

*And the Sword Hunters of the Hamran Arabs*

SAMUEL WHITE BAKER



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Published in 1867, Sir Samuel Baker's journal describes his expedition to Africa in search of the source of the Nile. Baker (1821-93), one of the most important British explorers of the nineteenth century, undertook a twelve-month journey to examine every individual tributary to the Nile, accompanied throughout by his wife Florence (whom he had first encountered in an Ottoman slave market). Reflecting his passion for exploring and his strength of character, Baker's highly descriptive, witty and fluid writing records his dangerous and difficult project, telling fascinating stories of the native people as well as relaying the facts of his exploration. From his hunting expeditions with the Hamran Arabs to his extensive journeys on camel-back and his life at camp, Baker's experiences are far removed from today's world, and his vivid descriptions provide the reader with an invaluable insight into what life was like in Africa in the mid-nineteenth century.

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# THE NILE TRIBUTARIES OF ABYSSINIA,

AND THE

SWORD HUNTERS OF THE HAMRAN ARABS.

BY

SIR SAMUEL W. BAKER, M.A. F.R.G.S.

GOLD MEDALLIST OF THE ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY;  
GRANDE MEDAILLE D'OR DE LA SOCIÉTÉ DE GÉOGRAPHIE DE PARIS;  
AUTHOR OF THE "ALBERT N'YANZA GREAT BASIN OF THE NILE," "EIGHT YEARS'  
WANDERINGS IN CEYLON," "THE RIFLE AND THE HOUND IN CEYLON,"  
ETC. ETC.

London:  
MACMILLAN AND CO.  
1867.

*(The Right of Translation is reserved.)*

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK,

WITH SPECIAL PERMISSION,

To His Royal Highness Albert Edward,

PRINCE OF WALES,

AS THE FIRST OF

ENGLAND'S ROYAL RACE

WHO HAS SAILED UPON THE WATERS OF

*THE NILE;*

THE LAKE SOURCES OF WHICH MIGHTY RIVER ARE HONOURED

BY THE NAMES OF

HIS AUGUST PARENTS.

## PREFACE.

THE work entitled "The Albert N'yanza Great Basin of the Nile," published in 1866, has given an account of the equatorial lake system, from which the Egyptian river derives its source. It has been determined by the joint explorations of Speke, Grant, and myself, that the rainfall of the equatorial districts supplies two vast lakes, the Victoria and the Albert, of sufficient volume to support the Nile throughout its entire course of thirty degrees of latitude. Thus the parent stream, fed by never-failing reservoirs, supplied by the ten months' rainfall of the equator, rolls steadily on its way through arid sands and burning deserts until it reaches the Delta of Lower Egypt.



It would at first sight appear that, the discovery of the lake sources of the Nile had completely solved the mystery of ages, and that the fertility of Egypt depended upon the rainfall of the equator concentrated in the lakes Victoria and Albert ; but the exploration of the Nile tributaries of Abyssinia divides the Nile system into two proportions, and unravels the entire mystery of the river, by assigning to each its due share in ministering to the prosperity of Egypt.

The lake-sources of Central Africa support the *life* of Egypt, by supplying a stream, throughout all seasons, that has sufficient volume to support the exhaustion of evaporation and absorption ; but this stream, if unaided, could never overflow its banks, and Egypt, thus deprived of the annual inundation, would simply exist, and cultivation would be confined to the close vicinity of the river.

The inundation, which by its annual deposit of mud has actually created the Delta of Lower Egypt, upon the overflow of which the fertility of Egypt depends, has an origin entirely separate from the lake-sources of Central Africa, and the supply of water is derived exclusively from Abyssinia.

The two grand affluents of Abyssinia are, the Blue Nile and the Atbara, which join the main stream respectively in N. lat.  $15^{\circ} 30'$  and  $17^{\circ} 37'$ . These rivers, although streams of extreme grandeur during the period of the Abyssinian rains, from the middle of June until September, are reduced during the dry months to utter insignificance; the Blue Nile becoming so shallow as to be unnavigable, and the Atbara perfectly dry. At that time, the water supply of Abyssinia having ceased, Egypt depends solely upon the equatorial lakes, and the affluents of the White Nile, until the rainy season shall again have flooded the two great Abyssinian arteries. That flood occurs suddenly about the 20th June, and the grand rush of water pouring down the Blue Nile and the Atbara into the parent channel, inundates Lower Egypt, and is the cause of its extreme fertility.

Not only is the inundation the effect of the Abyssinian rains, but the deposit of mud that has formed the Delta, and which is annually precipitated by the rising waters, is also due to the Abyssinian streams, more especially to the river Atbara, which, known as the Bahr el Aswat (Black River) carries a larger pro-

portion of soil than any other tributary of the Nile ; therefore, to the Atbara, above all other rivers, must the wealth and fertility of Egypt be attributed.

It may thus be stated : The equatorial lakes *feed* Egypt ; but the Abyssinian rivers *cause the inundation*.

This being a concise summary of the Nile system, I shall describe twelve months' exploration, during which I examined every individual river that is tributary to the Nile from Abyssinia, including the Atbara, Settite, Royān, Salaam, Angrab, Rahad, Dinder, and the Blue Nile. The interest attached to these portions of Africa differs entirely from that of the White Nile regions, as the whole of Upper Egypt and Abyssinia is capable of development, and is inhabited by races either Mohammedan or Christian ; while Central Africa is peopled by a hopeless race of savages, for whom there is no prospect of civilization.

The exploration of the Nile tributaries of Abyssinia occupied the first twelve months of my journey towards the Nile sources. During this time, I had the opportunity of learning Arabic and of studying the character of the people ; both necessary acquirements,

which led to my ultimate success in reaching the "Albert N'yanza." As the readers of the work of that title are aware, I was accompanied throughout the entire journey by my wife, who, with extraordinary hardihood and devotion, shared every difficulty with which African travel is beset.

# CONTENTS.

## CHAPTER I.

### ABOVE THE CATARACT.

Sterility—Arrival at Korosko—Twenty-six Days from Cairo—The Nubian Desert—Nature's Pyramids—Volcanic Bombs—The Stony Sea—The Camel's Grave—The Crows of Moorähd—A Delicious Draught—Rocks of the Desert—The perished Regiment—Arrival at the Nile—Distance from Korosko—Gazelles of the Desert—Dryness of the Atmosphere—Arrival at Berber—Halleem Effendi's Garden—Halleem gives Advice—The Nile rising—Visit of the Ladies—The Pillars of Sand—The Governor's Friendship—Save me from my Friends. . . *Page 1—25.*

## CHAPTER II.

The Cairo Dragoman Mahomet—Mahomet forsakes his Pistols—The Route to the Atbara—The Dry Bed of the River—The Dome Palm—Preparation of the Fruit—Pools of the Atbara—Collection of Birds—Charms of the Desert—Suffering of Men and Beasts—Collodabad—Hippopotamus kills the Arab—Daring Feat of the Fish-Eagle—Hippopotamus-shooting—Hippopotami bagged—Delight of the Arabs—Fishing—Catch a Tartar—Lose my Turtle Soup—Gazelle Shooting—The Speed of the Gazelle—Preparation of Water-skins—Tanning the Hides—Shoot a Crocodile—The River comes down—The mighty Stream of the Atbara—Change in the Season. . . . . *Page 26—54.*

## CHAPTER III.

## WILD ASSES OF THE DESERT.

My First and Last—Appetite for raw Meat—The Bishareen Arabs—Gozerajup—The First Rain—Limits of the Desert—The Haden-dowa Arabs—The Wells of Soojalup—Antelopes—Capabilities for Cotton Cultivation—Arab Migrations—The Arab's Prayer—The Barren Women—Difficulty in fording the River Gash—Arrive at Cassala—Hospitality of the Greek Merchant.

*Page 55—71.*

## CHAPTER IV.

## ROUTE FROM CASSALA TO SOUAKIM.

Facilities of the Port of Souakim—Fortifications of Cassala—Conquest of Nubia—Cruel Taxation—Extreme Cheapness of Corn—Cultivation of Cereals—Arab Bread—Military Position of Cassala—The Basé—Prepare to start from Cassala—Mahomet's Family Tree—Mahomet meets Relations—We cross the Gash—Stalking the Ariel—Bagged the Game—Descent of Vultures—Change of Scenery—The Source of the Delta—The Parent of Egypt . . . . . *Page 72—91*

## CHAPTER V.

## THE STORM.

Cotton Farm of Malem Georgis—Ferocious Crocodiles—Shoot a Monster—The Public Enemy—Resistance of a Crocodile's Scales—Discover Gold—Heavy Action of the Camel—El Baggar selects a Hygeen—The Easy-goer, suitable for a Lady—Hooked Thorns of the Mimosa—We charge a Kittar Bush—The Scorpion's Sting—Sudden Deluge—A Regiment of Scorpions—Valley of the Atbara—The Migration of Camels—A Milk Diet—The Arab Exodus—The Desert Patriarch . . . . . *Page 92—111.*

## CHAPTER VI.

## SHEIK ACHMET ABOU SINN.

The Arab Welcome—Abou Sinn's Advice—Arab Tribes of Nubia—  
 A Hint to Octogenarians—The Arab Pomade—The Arab Lady's  
 Perfumery—The Fatal Mixture—The Coiffure of the World—  
 The Arab Woman's Head-dress—"The Dust became Lice through  
 all Egypt"—The Arab Charms—The Rāhāt or Arab Kilt—  
 Arab Weddings—No Divorce Court—Anointing with Oil—  
 Nomadic Habits of the Arabs—Unchanging Customs of the  
 Arabs—The Hand of God—Religion of the Arabs.

*Page 112—131.*

## CHAPTER VII.

## THE DEPARTURE.

First-class Hygeens—Travelling Arrangements—The Evening Bi-  
 vouac—The Junction of the Settite River—Sheik Atalan  
 Wat Said—Abyssinian Frontier—Ismael Pasha burnt alive—  
 Mek Nimmur—The Enemy of Egypt—Arrival at Sofi—The  
 Reception—Position of Sofi—Florian, the German Settler—  
 The Cattle Fly—Peculiarities of the Seasons—The New Camp  
 —I become a Householder—Arrangement of our Establish-  
 ment—My "Baby"—An African Elysium—No Pipe!—The  
 Elements at Work . . . . . *Page 132—154.*

## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE PLAGUES OF EGYPT.

Go into Half Mourning—"Child of the Fever"—The Arab M.D.—  
 Arab Fondness for Relics—The Pest Spots of the World—The  
 Dangers of Holy Shrines—Arrival of the Holy Body—The  
 Faky's Grave—Arab Doctoring—Delights of Arab Surgery—

The Pig and the Koran—Sword Hunters of the Hamran Arabs—The Arab Shields—Hints for carrying the Sword—Keeness of the Edge—Arab Swordsmanship—The Aggageers—Elephant-hunting with the Sword—Disabled by his own Sword—Maria Theresa—Great Failure—The Baboons and the Crocodile—The drowned Elephant—Game on the East Bank—Capabilities of the Soil—Tanning of Leather—Native Baskets and Matting—Bacheet is too attentive—"Oh Bacheet! You Ignoramus!"—Ferocity of the Seroot Fly—Cross the Atbara—The Impromptu Raft—Stalking Giraffes—Within Range—The First Rush of the Herd—The Retreat of the Giraffes—Death of the Giraffes—Passage of the River—The Giraffe Sentry—A Difficult Stalk—The Seroot Fly takes Possession—Giraffe Steaks—A Hunt for the Tétel—Floating Meat across a River—Buoy for Men and Cargo—Scare the Crocodiles—The Lions devour the Giraffe—Arab Music—Arrange to cross the River . . . . . Page 155—204.

## CHAPTER IX.

### FORM A RAFT WITH THE SPONGING BATH.

The Impromptu Ferry—Achmet is tempted by Satan—Mahomet's Relative absconds—End of the Rainy Season—The Seroot Fly disappears—The "Till"—Preparations for Fishing—"That was a Monster!"—The "Bayard"—Masara the Slave—Cross the Peninsula to Settite—Jungle Cooking—A miserable Night—Shoot badly—Fishing in the Atbara—A Good Run—Another Monster—Bacheet lands Him—The Baboons visit us—The Coor—Wild Vegetables—Death of Atalan Wat Said—Catch a Baggar—Fish salting—The Arbour. Page 205—230.

## CHAPTER X.

### A FEW NOTES AT ÉHÉTILLA.

Fire the Valley—Arrival of Birds—Seized by a Crocodile—Audacity of the Buzzard—The Abomination of Thorns—



Boa Constrictor—The Baboons hunt for Berries—Masses of small Birds—Cunning of the Crocodile—Method of seizing its Prey—Horse dealing—Arab Saddles and Bits—Arrive at Sherif el Ibrahim—Arrival at the Settite—Recall of Mahomet—Sheik Achmet Wat el Négur—Mansfield Parkyns—Advantages of a “Sweet Name”—Elephants destroy the Crops—An Invitation to Shoot—The Hippo challenges Bacheet—A Good Shot—A Rush at the Carcase—Elephants at Night—Kill an Elephant . . . . . *Page 231–256.*

## CHAPTER XI.

## THE FORD.

Girls carried away by the Rapids—An Amphibious Arab Girl—Search for the Body—The Corpse recovered—The Sheik lays down the Law—“The Fact is simply Impossible”—The Sheik’s Idea of Matrimony—The Duties of His Four Wives—The Maimed, the Halt, and the Blind—The Arab Fakeers or Priests—“All the Same with a little Difference”—The Cure for Frendeet—Arrival at Katariff—The Market Day—Scenes at the Fair—Custom of scarifying the Cheeks—The Galla Slave—Purchase her Freedom—Singular Misunderstanding—Mahomet’s Explanation—Mek Nimmur invades the Frontier—Mek Nimmur’s Tactics—Insecurity of the Country—Mek Nimmur sends me his Compliments—Rodur Sherrif’s Withered Arm—The Aggageers—Mixture for Bullets—We make Arrow-root—Florian’s Hunter—Arrive at Geera—Follow a Herd of Elephants—Track up the Elephants—A Tremendous Crash—A Critical Position—The Forehead Shot—The Half-pound Explosive Shell—Recover my old wounded Elephant—Fraternise with the Sword Hunters. . . . . *Page 257–295.*

## CHAPTER XII.

## OLD NEPTUNE JOINS THE PARTY.

The Arab Centaurs—Wild Arab Horsemanship—Discipline of the Gun-bearers—Off goes the Gun, and its Master!—Ombrégas