



Lord Macartney's Diary
A Narrative of a Journey to Egypt

Edited by

Alexander Nera

LORD MAYFORD'S DIARY

A NARRATIVE OF A JOURNEY TO EGYPT



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ALEXANDER NERÁ

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INTRODUCTION

The material of this booklet is based on the diary and the letters of Charles Mayford, a nobleman holding the title of baron, who went on a journey to Egypt in 1810.

A German known as Professor Rose got hold of Mayford's documents in the 1880s and translated parts of them into German. Neither was he a professor, nor was his name Rose, but everyone called him that because he was fascinated by plants, especially flowers. He was known to visit any public and private garden that existed and dreamed of discovering and naming an unknown species.

The real name of Rose is unknown. But it appears that he intended to use Lord Mayford's documents as guidance for his own journey to Egypt where he intended to search for unknown plants.

I do not know if he ever went to Egypt. His notes, however, must have been photocopied in the 20th century. Those copies were found by a friend of mine, who bought an old house, the location of which I will conceal. My friend was not able to make head or tail of them, but noticed that they were related to the Regency era and sent me the papers in case I might be interested.

I translated the text back to English. As Rose rearranged the text into a chronological order, it is unclear which sections were originally part of the diary and the letters respectively. Some parts of the diary seem to have been omitted because there are big time gaps.

Both Rose's writing and the copies have faded over time. Therefore, certain passages of the text below are rather an educated guess by me than a translation.

I have no information about what happened to the original documents or Professor Rose's manuscript. Of course, everybody would wish to look at the original documents instead of my imperfect transcription of a fragmentary translation. Nevertheless, I hope the reader will find it useful and interesting.

LORD MAYFORD'S DIARY

22nd May 1810, London

I hate London! I should never have come here. I could have stayed at home, riding, enjoying the calm and quiet of the country. Instead, here I am, running into that insufferable Thane woman. Mrs Anna M. Thane. What does that "M." stand for anyway? Maniac would fit the picture!

I was at a ball last night looking for some chaps to join me for a round of cards or two. I understand the young folk are busy dancing and jollyng the ladies along. But what was the rest doing? Standing in the lobby, listening to some kind of speech.

You know England is going downhill when there's nobody there to join you for a decent card game. I went closer to find out who was making a fuss about what and saw that Thane woman. She was announcing her latest plans for an expedition to Egypt, going on about pyramids, Pharaohs and sarcophagi. What rubbish. Heat, I say, and sand. Lots of it.

I went back into the ballroom and managed to get a drink (a real drink, not the lemonade they carry around on the trays). Suddenly, I hear someone call out "Charles!" and see her coming towards me.

Why is it that she always calls me by my first name? Some years ago, I was at another ball. It was the same

then. She approached me, called me Charles and asked how I was. I had never seen that woman in my life! Since then, whenever it was my misfortune to end up in the same social function as A.M.T., she came over and went on endlessly about her geographical endeavours. Last time, it was the Amazon, or the Andes, in any case some godforsaken place nobody in his right mind would even want as a colony. But Mrs Thane acts as if she were His Royal Highness The Prince Regent's Officially Appointed Explorer.

So it was yet another destination yesterday.

"I wonder if you might be interested in my intentions of travelling to Egypt," she announced.

"I am very interested, Ma'am. If I know everything about them, it is easier not to become involved."

She was undeterred. "The focus of this journey will be quite archaeological. You might have a share in some astounding discoveries."

"If those discoveries require any digging in the earth, you might consider taking along my gardener instead of me."

Well, one could have phrased that differently, but that woman is just so intrusive.

"Do you dislike travelling in general or only travel plans I am considering?" she asked defensively.

"I dislike travelling if it is unnecessary."

"How can you say research of ancient cultures is unnecessary? Even if we will not be able to discover an unknown temple of the Middle Kingdom, though I am quite optimistic that we will, don't you think an

encounter with an alien civilisation in Egypt will constitute a personal gain for you?"

"I think I am sufficiently alienated by my encounters here in London."

"Very well," she said stiffly. "Let me know if you change your mind."

She's unbelievable.

23rd May 1810, London

A quiet evening with cards had been my plan. Roxwell, Wilmcote and Highley came over for a quick dinner and a much longer game.

Roxwell had not finished dealing, when Wilmcote began:

"Have you heard about the archaeological exploration that Mrs Thane is planning? I find her approach most interesting."

"Most," I said and looked very intensely at my cards.

"Indeed," Highley chimed in. "She has published one of her famous appeals again. Very well written and extremely well researched." He pulled a sheet of paper out of his pocket and placed it in the middle of the table for us to see.

"Aren't they always?" I murmured and played a card, trying to cover the bulletin-sized Appeal with it.

"She is still looking for fellow travellers and financial support," Highley informed us.

"Wouldn't you be suited for that, Mayford?" cried Wilmcote.

"What?" I had not expected that.

"The expedition. You would certainly be a most valuable addition. You know your way around foreign countries and a tight corner. You are excellent at riding and shooting. A seasoned soldier and officer. Isn't Egypt quite similar to India?

"Not very much," I said.

"But wouldn't you like to go?"

It went on endlessly. Wilmcote and Highley seemed determined to recruit someone for the Travel Maniac. Thankfully, Roxwell kept out of it. Roxwell never speaks when playing cards. I shouldn't either.

When they had finally left, I ordered the footman to tell any visitor who might so much as know Anna M. Thane that I had left for Scotland.

2nd June 1810, London

I hate White's. I should never have become a member.

White's used to be a place where you could enjoy a decent drink and a good cigar. Women are not admitted, so the atmosphere is peaceful, and conversation is limited to innocuous subjects, such as politics or the military situation in Europe. No self-appointed explorers to be expected.

The evening started off badly because I ran into Lord Doddington when I arrived.

"Mayford."

"Doddington," I nodded.

"I heard you went to Scotland."

"Yes. Family matters."

Doddington is as stupid as he is rich, and he is very rich. His wife takes advantage of that by sending him to the clubs and spending his money about town. He is of average build, but his movements are awkward. When he walks, he constantly seems to stumble over something. I'd like to see Wellesley trying to introduce military step in a battalion of Doddingtons!

"Let's have a seat," he said. "I meant to ask you something."

We found a table and ordered drinks.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Wilmcote says you intent to join Mrs Thane's next expedition to the Valley of the Kings or wherever they are heading."

"Does he indeed?" I considered what I was going to do next time I would meet Wilmcote.

"You are smiling. Does that mean you have already committed yourself?"

"I am committed to staying damn well out of it."

Doddington looked surprised.

"I thought you were in favour of Mrs Thane's plans. Someone mentioned you asked her about all the details."

"No, there has been a misunderstanding. Surely, after so much positive response, her travelling party must be complete by now."

"Well, she has a list with names of over sixty supporters."

"Sixty! Is this going to be an invasion rather than an expedition?"

"They are supporters, not travellers. They agreed to make a financial contribution. But the list of those who actually want to go to Egypt is much shorter."

"You could go." There is nothing like a counter-charge at the right moment.

"Yes, I could. My wife has suggested it, but I don't think I could spare the time. No, I agree with Wilmcote. You would be the right man."

"Thank you, but I'd rather not."

"It might be a nice change."

"Look, Doddington, you don't know what you are talking about. A journey to Egypt is another matter than going from London to your Yorkshire estate."

"Come now, sir! You have no right to be condescending. I may not have your experience, India, and the army, and all that, but I do have good –" He paused.

"Reflexes!" he added triumphantly.

"Reflexes? Reflexes! I have never heard such humbug. This is not about shrinking away from a fidgeting horse. You need people who are ready to take action!" I slammed my brandy glass on the table. "Tell you what, Doddington. See that little figurine on that side table over there? If you can hit it with this glass, you can join the Thane expedition, and I will set out with my own party. And then we'll see who reaches the Valley of the Kings first."

I got up and turned to leave. A second later, I heard a loud crash and glass shattering. Looking back, I saw that the figurine was gone, and the large mirror lay shattered

on the floor. Doddington was standing there, pale, looking at the mess and flailing his arms.

The whole club was in uproar immediately. Everyone gathered around us. When Doddington had explained at least three times what had happened, it was an established fact that Doddington and I had made a wager on arriving first in the Valley of the Kings in Egypt – he committing himself to joining the Thane expedition, I undertaking to travel independently.

I spotted Wilmcote in the crowd. When he noticed my gaze, he started to move away.

“Wilmcote,” I cried. “You started this! You will come with me.”

“I? No! I cannot ...” His voice trailed away.

Some people murmured reproachfully. “Come on, Wilmcote!” one said.

“You can’t let him go all by himself!” another added.

Some shouted, “Hear, hear!”

“Highley should come along as well!” cried Wilmcote.

“Highley? Why?” I asked.

“He brought the bulletin!”

“What?”

“The Egypt bulletin by Mrs Thane. He is the one who brought it to your place the other day.”

That was ridiculous.

“Don’t be absurd, Wilmcote. Highley is over sixty and in no shape to travel.”

“Roxwell then! He was there, too.”

“Roxwell is one of the few sane people who are not permanently going on about that Thane woman,” I said.

"I am only coming if Roxwell is coming," insisted Wilmcote.

I found Roxwell among the crowd. "What do you say, Roxwell?"

He shrugged. "Sure. Care for a game of cards now?"

I thank God for old Roxwell.

Now then, I have found my travelling companions. Let's see if A.M.T. can match that!

4th June 1810, London

Yesterday, I went out of town. I wasn't in the mood for any more excited chatter about explorations, excavations, or Egypt in general.

I had a late breakfast this morning. My man Bolton was serving. When there are no large parties in the house, I leave most of the staff at my country estate. I was taking a sip of tea when I heard loud voices in the hall. I am not available to visitors until I have had breakfast, and my footman has been instructed accordingly. This racket at such a time was unprecedented.

Then I recognized Wilmcote's voice. He was ordering my footman about. This was also a first. But Wilmcote was probably panicking by now and had come to withdraw from the Egypt plan. Well, I cannot back out, and I won't let him either.

The door burst open and Wilmcote stormed into the room.

"What are you doing?" he shouted.

"Having breakfast."

"There is not a minute to lose."

"I think these eggs will stay warm just a little longer."

"I am talking about the journey to the Valley of the Kings. The others are leaving London in three days!"

"Three days? How could they get the rest of the funding so quickly?"

"Doddington."

Right. Of course he would contribute the balance. It is no issue for him.

"But will the group be willing to leave at such short notice?"

"Doddington told them to be there – or go to hell."

There is a man on his mission.

"And what's she saying?"

"Mrs Thane phrased it more politely, but the message was the same."

Bolton had closed the door and started laying the table for Wilmcote.

"Sit down and eat something," I said. "And then we will get to work. Bolton, we will need you afterwards for making travel arrangements."

"My lord?"

"Egypt. Departure this week. You are coming with us, of course."

"Very good, my lord."

10th June 1810, Plymouth

We arrived in Plymouth in the early afternoon, found an inn and left Bolton and the luggage there. Roxwell,

Wilmcote and I went to the harbour and spent several hours looking for a passage that would bring us to Egypt. Our search was in vain. The only option seemed to be a ship destined for Malta, via Lisbon, so we went there. We found a seasoned sailor, who stood on the pier and shouted commands at a dozen seamen. He turned out to be the first mate. He informed us that the ship was not completely full, but that a nobleman had reserved any available space for himself and his party.

"And would you happen to know the name of that gentleman, my good man?" I asked the sailor.

"It is Lord Doddington and a party of explorers, sir."

While Wilmcote was swearing under his breath, we thanked the mate, who started yelling at his men again.

"There is nothing else we can do today," I said. "Let's go back to the inn."

"Why don't you go ahead?" Roxwell asked. "I think I may know the captain and would at least like to greet him."

We had no objections, and he went onto the ship. On the way back, Wilmcote lamented a general lack of gentlemanly behaviour among the English nobility.

When Roxwell arrived at the inn, he said: "It's all settled. The captain has put us on the passenger list."

Wilmcote and I congratulated him excitedly and asked how he had achieved that, but he only shook his head and smiled. When Roxwell was an infantry officer, he always managed to arrange things. His men used to be as well supplied as the staff at headquarters.

11th June 1810, at sea

When we arrived at the pier today, we saw the other party watching their luggage being loaded onto the ship. We noticed Doddington, A.M.T., and about a dozen other persons. Doddington was furious when he learned that we were to be on the same passage. But there was nothing he could do, as the captain had left clear orders. Doddington finally calmed down, and the second mate, a young chap in his twenties, managed to have all passengers gather on deck.

"Welcome on board, ladies and gentlemen," he said. "The Captain and the first mate apologize for not being here, but they were obliged to see the harbour master and decided to take care of the matter immediately so that our setting sail will not be delayed. I would now like to assign the cabins."

He pulled out a sheet of paper and continued. "Lord Doddington, normally the Captain would invite you to take his cabin, but, under the circumstances, we were wondering whether you would agree to the Captain's cabin being offered to Lord Mayford and his wife."

"What?" shouted Doddington angrily.

"His wife?" I shouted even louder.

"I am sorry," stammered the poor chap. "I meant to say – Lady Mayford." He turned to A.M.T., who looked puzzled. "I apologize, ma'am – my lady. I didn't mean to ..."

I looked around, but Roxwell was nowhere to be seen.

It took a while to reassure the mate and reassign the cabins. In the end, A.M.T. got the captain's cabin for herself and her maid, Doddington was given a cabin of

his own, and Wilmcote and I were shown to a small space where we found Roxwell, who had made himself comfortable already.

"Wife?" I asked him with a look of reproach.

"You know," he said. "People tend to misunderstand."

14th June 1810, at sea

Bad weather and choppy seas had kept the passengers below deck, but on the third morning after our departure from Plymouth, the sky was clear again and a fresh breeze was blowing.

The passengers came on deck, and introductions were made. The expedition and the wager were the major topics of conversation, of course.

Apart from her and Doddington, ten other persons were travelling with the Thane party: Doddington had brought a groom and his valet, she her maid. There were two gentlemen from the British Museum; a Scotsman, who had been in the army at some time; a professor emeritus from Oxford, whose specialty was African ethnology; and three other English gentlemen, who were apparently fascinated by Egypt or A.M.T. or both.

I stood leeward on the stern. One of the two gentlemen from the British Museum was examining the horizon with a spyglass. There was absolutely nothing to see except water and sky, in my opinion, but every few minutes he put aside the spyglass and took assiduous notes in a little notebook.

Doddington strolled over to the stern. When he saw me, he nodded curtly and turned round again, but Wilmcote had come over to speak to him.

"Lord Doddington. Good morning!"

"Morning."

"Isn't it curious that we are making good progress, but things are kept in perfect balance as for our wager? Until Malta, at least."

"Indeed," answered Doddington. "But you will have ample opportunity to fall behind later."

"You think so? It may be the other way round."

"Hardly so. We are well prepared for the journey to the Valley of the Kings."

"Don't you think we have made preparations as well? Never underestimate your opponent!"

"Never would."

Bored by their bickering, I was about to leave the stern. The gentleman had put away his notebook and approached Doddington and Wilmcote.

"Forgive my intrusion, dear sirs, but I couldn't help but overhear your conversation. I was not aware of the fact that we have two parties on board which are travelling to two different destinations."

"You are mistaken, sir," said Wilmcote. "We have two parties with the same destination."

"But did I not hear you mention the Valley of the Kings?"

"Of course!" Doddington called out. "That is the destination of this expedition. You should know that."

"I beg your pardon, Lord Doddington, but the expedition is going to Faiyum."

"Where?"

"To Faiyum," repeated the gentleman. "The Valley of the Kings is much farther south."

Doddington and Wilmcote were confused, and so was I. In an attempt to clear the matter, I entered the conversation, but the gentleman was insistent. Eventually, A.M.T. was sent for. She came and confirmed that the expedition was meant to go to the Faiyum region, not the Valley of the Kings.

Everyone fell silent.

"It is of no matter," Doddington said finally. "Mrs Thane, we will just have to make a little detour first to the Valley of the Kings."

"Lord Doddington, you cannot be in earnest."

"Of course, I am. We will go to the Valley of the Kings, and afterwards we will bring you to that other place, safe and sound."

"This is ridiculous, Lord Doddington. We are going to Faiyum and nowhere else."

"Mrs Thane! Must I remind you that I have funded the major portion of the costs of this expedition? I insist that you amend your travel plans, so that the Valley of the Kings be reached at the earliest possible point in time."

"I am grateful for your support, Lord Doddington. But the destination of this expedition cannot be a matter of discussion. If you have indeed engaged in this journey on the basis of a misconception, you may feel free to

withdraw now. I would be sorry if you did, but I will continue the journey with the means available to me."

She was angry now. I had not seen her angry before; it was quite scary.

"Under no circumstances," she continued, "will I agree to crisscross through Egypt in order to accommodate the whim of two bored gentlemen who have not the least interest in archaeological studies. The Valley of the Kings is hundreds of miles off our route. Nobody in his right mind would go there just so he can boast about it in London. You seem to have forgotten that this is an expedition to Egypt, not a walk in Hyde Park!"

An awkward silence followed this outburst.

"He forced the wager on me!" Doddington cried eventually, pointing at me.

"He smashed the figurine!" I shot back.

A.M.T. looked at the two of us and said icily: "I am not familiar with the rituals being performed in a gentlemen's club, and I would prefer to keep it that way."

She turned and walked away.

After a while, Doddington looked at me and said, "I still consider myself bound to our wager."

"I expected no less," I answered, "and will also honour our agreement, of course."

"However, I must admit that I am uncertain as for my further actions."

"I understand what you mean. There is some vagueness to the situation."

"Precisely."

"Let us reconsider our conversation at the club. If I remember correctly, I dared you to go to Egypt."

"In the most offensive and condescending manner!" he exclaimed.

"Well, you would not let the topic drop and kept prattling about this expedition."

"All right, all right. What were you going to say?"

"If I remember correctly, we agreed that you would join the expedition and that the race should go to the Valley of Kings."

"But that is not where the expedition is going."

"No."

"Then the matter is clear. You shall go to that valley; I will stay with the expedition until they have reached that other place and then outrun you to the valley."

"Not acceptable. There is no way you can go to Faiyum and still beat me to the valley. That would place you at a disadvantage. No. I have said what I have said. You are going to Faiyum, I to the valley. Whoever reaches his destination first, is the winner."

"No, sir," he exclaimed. "The valley is much farther south. It is inconceivable that anyone could reach it sooner than a much closer place. The whole club would laugh at me if I agreed to that."

"Well ...," I said vaguely.

"You could go to that fay place."

"Faiyum?"

"Yes!"

"Why would I go to Faiyum?"

"The expedition is going there. We could agree that this is the finish of our race."

"Excellent idea, Doddington! And when we come back to London, we tell everyone that, halfway to Egypt, we felt the Valley of the Kings was too far after all, and we decided to go to a more convenient place instead. Do you think it matters much if you return home as the winner or the loser of such an arrangement?"

"Well ...," he said.

We fell silent again.

"Tell me, Doddington, what is the most distant place you noted down in your travel plans?"

"None."

"None?"

"I never got involved in the planning. She took care of all that. I thought she would work out a route that would take us straight to the Pyramids."

"Giza?"

"I thought her name was Anna," he said in surprise.

"I meant you thought you were going to the Pyramids, not to the Valley of the Kings?"

"Isn't that the same?"

"No."

"But the Pyramids were built by kings, were they not?"

"I think so."

"So why are the Pyramids of the Kings not in the Valley of the Kings?"

"How would I know? Would you like to consult your esteemed expedition leader?"

"No!" he shouted. "Never mind. That valley is probably some kind of summer residence."

"Right. So what do we do?"

"We should have written it down to avoid such confusion."

"It has been written down. It's in the book," I said.

"The Book of the Club! You are right. But the book is in London."

"So?"

"We need to go to London, check the book, and start all over."

We looked at each other.

"Are you sure?" I asked him.

"Yes. What else can we do?"

"So we will leave the ship in Lisbon and return home?"

"You can return. I gave Mrs Thane my word that I would join her expedition and stay with them until they have reached their destination."

"Which is Faiyum, not the Valley of the Kings."

"I know that now!" he shouted.

"Fine. I understand. In that case I will come with you to Faiyum."

"Why? You haven't committed yourself to the expedition."

"Do you think I would return to London while you continue to Egypt? The whole club would still be laughing at me when you get back. No, sir. If you are going, I am going as well."

"Very well," he said testily.

"Very well," I said.

11th July 1810, Alexandria

After a residence of a few days at Malta, we found a merchant vessel that was bound for Alexandria. The current which sets in from the Adriatic and the Archipelago is so strong between Candia and the coast of Egypt that it will carry a vessel, sailing with a moderate breeze, twenty miles south of her course within twenty-four hours. The current adds to the difficulty of entering the harbour. We were obliged to take a pilot on board, who steered us through the numerous sand-banks which obstruct the Western port of Alexandria.

When we stepped on shore, the novelty of every object which met our view convinced us that we had quitted Europe.

"How strange! Horses and oxen seem to have been replaced by donkeys and camels in this country!" Doddington exclaimed incredulously.

A.M.T. took the chance to lecture us about Egypt being the native soil of the donkey, where the breed, though small, is extremely docile and active, trotting at the rate of four or five miles an hour, and for these qualities it is preferred throughout the country as the ordinary means of travelling.

After A.M.T. and Mr. Halesworth from the British Museum had found a local guide a day after our arrival, the next task was to obtain suitable means of transport. The usual approach is to buy or rent a number of donkeys. Doddington would have none of that.

"I'll be damned if I travel through Egypt on one of these brutes!" he shouted. "They can carry the luggage. I'd rather walk than ride one of them."

A.M.T., our local guide and Mr. Halesworth tried to reason with him, but to no avail.

Eventually, I intervened. "Don't raise a breeze, Doddington. There is no need to shine everyone else down in the middle of the desert."

"I am surprised at you, sir!" he exclaimed. "As a former cavalry officer, how can you even consider riding on such a beast?"

"As long as I am riding, it does not matter to me."

Poor Doddington, he had no allies in this. In a meek voice, he made a final attempt: "Mr Roxwell, is it also your intention to rely on a donkey as your means of transport?"

"Certainly not."

"Not?" Doddington asked in astonishment.

I turned to Roxwell. "What do you mean?"

"I am going to buy a horse."

"Well said, sir!" Doddington boomed. "I trust you have already considered how to go about it?"

In the end, five of us decided to buy a horse: Doddington; Roxwell; Meldrum, the Scotsman; Hawkridge, a sporty chap – and I.

19th July 1810, Cairo

We quitted Alexandria on the 14th and took the road that led to Rosetta. After travelling over a tract of country that

was extremely dreary and uninteresting in its appearance, we finally arrived in Cairo.

Cairo's houses are built of brick, and are remarkable for their extreme height. The streets, however, are mean and dirty, and so narrow as scarcely to allow two loaded camels to pass.

It is certainly not my favourite city, but many of our party were attracted by the bazaars. A.M.T. started lecturing again: "Cairo is a place of considerable commerce. It is the metropolis of the trade of Eastern Africa." She went on about caravans that bring gold dust, ivory, rhinoceros' horns, drugs and whatnot to the city.

This time, Doddington was intrigued. "We should make some purchases!" he suggested excitedly.

His wife had probably given him a list of things to buy for her.

Some people nodded, and Doddington continued. "I want one of these funny oriental swords with a curved blade. You know, it's curved, but at the point it's curved the other way."

"You are probably referring to ataghans, which are of Turkish origin," Mr Halesworth said. "You may expect to find some pieces of good quality here in Cairo."

Doddington was excited. "Excellent. Mr Halesworth, would you be willing to accompany and advise me as to which of these atta-things best to acquire?"

"Ataghans," Mr Halesworth said. "It would be my pleasure."

They should have her join them, too. Then Doddington could be taught everything he never wanted to know about merchandise in Cairo.

It was agreed that the following day be bazaar day.

20th July 1810, Cairo

Everyone seemed to have drawn up a shopping list over night, and the members of our party eagerly left the inn after breakfast, individually or in groups of two or three, to go to the bazaar.

I checked on the horses and then went to the bazaar by on my own. It was, admittedly, a most brilliant and interesting spectacle. For an hour, I drifted through an endless ocean of booths and people. Each trade had its allotted quarter. Groceries, Turkish and Arab dresses, every species of eastern luxury and magnificence, even a wide selection of costly swords. Surely, Doddington would be able to –

“This is a very fine piece!” a familiar voice said. “What do you say, Mr Halesworth? Ah, Mayford, what do you think of this?”

There was Doddington, pointing a dagger at me. Slowly, I pushed the blade away from my face.

“Found anything yet?” I asked him.

“Many fine pieces. But I’d like something more decorative. Perhaps bejewelled.”

I bet that’s what his wife always says.

He turned to the merchant. “Don’t you have anything with gems on it? It doesn’t matter if it’s pricey.”

There is a negotiator.

"All fine swords," the merchant said and pointed at the display in front of Doddington.

"Yes, yes. But I am looking for something special. Something unusual."

The merchant hesitated for a moment and looked suspiciously at the melee around us. Then he made a gesture towards his aid and said something in Arabic, which probably meant that the aid was to keep an eye on things, and whispered to us: "Follow me."

He went to the back of his booth, drew away a curtain and let us step through the opening. Not five feet behind the booth was the front of a house. The merchant took a key from his caftan and unlocked a heavy wooden door. We entered and found ourselves in a dimly lit room full of cabinets and boxes. With another key, the merchant opened a chest and took out something wrapped into a silk cloth, which he carefully laid on a small table. He removed the cloth slowly, and we saw a sword that was about two feet in length. The merchant picked it up and put it into Doddington's hands.

"Very old, very valuable," he said and looked at us expectantly.

Doddington drew the sword from its sheath. Both pieces were wonderfully crafted. The blade showed the lines typical for Damascus steel. Sheath and handle, probably made of silver, were finely chiselled in an elaborate pattern, and gemstones of different colours were embedded in the metal.

"This is extraordinary," said Doddington, greatly impressed. "I'll take it outside to have a closer look."

"No!" shouted the merchant.

A tense conversation in Arabic ensued between the merchant and Mr Halesworth. Then Mr Halesworth turned to us.

"He won't let us take it outside. He says it is a very old piece, one of a kind. Therefore, it is not safe outside, and he doesn't want his competitors to see it."

"I understand that," Doddington said while he stabbed several imaginary enemies. He gave me the sword. "What do you think?"

I weighed the sword in my hand.

"It's nicely balanced," I said. "The handle is indeed made of silver. And here," I pointed at the blade. "See these lines? I think the steel is also of a very good quality."

Doddington turned to the merchant. "How much?"

The merchant said something in a low voice I could not understand. Halesworth seemed a bit pale, but Doddington only looked at him questioningly. Whatever the asking price was, it was well within Doddington's budget.

"It is a lot of money," Halesworth said. "Then again, it is an extraordinary piece. If it really were as old as he claims, it would be a fantastic bargain, so I think it was made recently. You might try to beat down the price somewhat."

"I'll take it," said Doddington to the merchant.

Doddington will never be a thrifty man. But I cannot be cross with him for not haggling. For this piece, I might even have tried to outbid him.

21st July 1810, Cairo

This morning, leaving the luggage at the inn, we went to the Pyramids of Giza, intending to devote the day to the examination of these wonderful monuments.

The interior of the Great Pyramid is fascinating, and no description can match the experience of seeing it for yourself. Ascending to the top is as exhausting as climbing a mountain, but the effort is rewarded by a view of the boundless expanse of desert.

It is this desert that we will have to traverse to reach our final destination. We shall leave Cairo tomorrow, and everyone is eager to complete the last stage of our journey.

24th July 1810, the desert

Reading my last entry above, it seems particularly odd that we are now farther from Faiyum than three days ago.

We made good progress on the 22nd and set up camp in the late afternoon. On the 23rd, we started very early, so we could benefit from the cooler morning hours. We had an extensive rest around noon and set up camp again in the evening.

The sun had sunk when I took a walk around the perimeter of our camp. I ascended a small sand dune,

and suddenly I saw a figure in a black robe. Immediately, I reached for my pistol.

"Hello, Charles."

Then I recognized her.

"You shouldn't sneak around like this," I said. "One might mistake you for an intruder."

"Or a djinn, perhaps."

"That wouldn't be altogether unfounded."

"I have heard that you make fun of me behind my back."

"When would I have done that?"

"You referred to me as 'Giza', did you not?"

"That was –" But how should I explain that Doddington never understands anything? Instead I said, "I thought it fitting."

"Does it indicate your approval or your disapproval of this journey?"

"At least it indicates that you are where you want to be."

"You are also here, though."

"Which is exactly what makes you and Doddington such a scary pair."

"Then you know who to stay away from in the future."

"Indeed. I have thought about relocating to the far reaches of the planet. But I would be afraid that you will show up sooner or later and start digging for ancient treasures under my straw hut."

"It's possible, of course," she said. "However, I assure you that this sand dune is safe from me tonight. Enjoy the quiet of the desert."

She walked back to the camp.

As I was not on watch that night, I slept undisturbed until the early morning. I was woken by loud calls. "Up everybody! Get up! Have your weapons ready! Check your luggage, everyone, but look out!"

I grabbed my pistols and left the tent. The others appeared to find out what was going on. Some fumbled with the luggage. Then Doddington came running and shouted "Thieves! Damn thieves! They have taken my sword. I shall kill them!"

Roxwell appeared. "What is going on?" I asked him.

"Something startled the horses. I checked and saw people running away from the camp."

"Damn them!" exclaimed Doddington. "But good thing we bought those horses, right?"

I ignored him. "What exactly did you see, Roxwell?"

"Two people. They ran in a westerly direction. I did not see any bundles. So they cannot have stolen much."

"Are you out of your mind?" Doddington exploded. "They took my sword! It was the first thing I checked. I am going to kill them!"

"Keep calm," I said. "There is nothing but desert in that direction. They must have left their mounts behind somewhere. If we are quick, we may be able to catch them before they get away."

"You are right!" Doddington agreed.

"Well?" I asked.

"What?"

"Let's go!" I yelled at him.

"Yes, let's go!" he shouted excitedly.

We ran to the horses and saddled them.

"Good thing we bought those horses, right?" Doddington shouted again. "Whoa! Good boy. Where is my groom, damn it?"

Hawkridge, Roxwell, and I were ready first. Roxwell showed us the footprints of the intruders, and we followed them as fast as we could. It was almost dawn, which helped our pursuit.

The traces led westward in an almost straight line. We came to a huge sand dune, which was several hundred feet wide and about half as high. Hawkridge turned left to get around it. Roxwell and I kept to the right.

Behind the sand dune was an enormous swale, about as extensive as the sand dune itself. We saw three people on horses. Two of them had negotiated the swale and were galloping away to the southwest. We would never catch them.

The third rider was still in the swale, but not far from its rim. By the time we would have circled the swale, he would have escaped as well.

Then we saw Hawkridge at the southern side of the swale. He was going after the third rider as fast as his horse could run. The other rider had reached even ground and was gaining speed. The two of them were about 30 yards apart, but we could see that Hawkridge had the inferior horse.

Hawkridge drew a pistol and rose in his stirrups. He stretched his arm and took aim. Not long, and the other rider would be out of reach. But Hawkridge acted

deliberately. A moment later we heard the shot, and the other rider fell off his horse.

Even Roxwell was impressed. "Fine shot," he murmured.

When we reached Hawkridge, he had dismounted and was loading his pistol. "He's dead," Hawkridge announced. The Bedouin lay in the sand, blood trickling from his body.

Roxwell and I went after the Bedouin's horse. We found it after a while, with Doddington's sword strapped to the saddle. When we returned, Doddington and Meldrum had arrived on their horses and were waiting with Hawkridge by the dead Bedouin. Doddington took his sword back and was full of praise. He thanked us and Hawkridge in particular for saving his treasure.

"Let's ride back," I said when Doddington had finished telling us what he thought of thieving Bedouins.

"What about him?" asked Meldrum pointing at the dead man.

"We'll leave him here," I answered. "His people will come back soon. And we don't know how soon and how many people."

We went back to the camp, and the chase was described again. There was some shock about the fact that someone was killed.

"What I am surprised about is that the thieves took the sword only and stole nothing else," I contemplated. "It seems as if they knew exactly that the sword was here. Doddington, you haven't told anyone you have an expensive sword, have you?"

"Well, no," he said reluctantly.

"Doddington?" I prompted.

"Well, when we were at the Pyramids, I happened to speak to one of the people there. You know how hard they tried to sell us things. This person, though, was very cultivated and spoke good English. Somehow the topic of daggers and swords came up."

"And you showed him the sword?"

"No, of course not! I merely asked him if he knew where I could buy a sword similar to mine – without telling him that I already had one."

"Why did you want another sword, for heaven's sake?"

"I didn't. And I don't. I was just interested in finding out if that sword was in fact as unique as that merchant in Cairo claimed."

"So you gave him a detailed description of the sword?"

"Yes," he mumbled. "But he said he did not know where one could buy such a sword."

"But he understood you already had one?"

Doddington cleared his throat. "I cannot entirely exclude the possibility that this man was able to deduce, from what I told him, that one of our group – possibly myself – had at some point during our journey – possibly quite recently – bought a chiselled sword with differently coloured gemstones."

"See? You put him up to this!" I exclaimed. "The man wants the sword, and he hired three Bedouins to steal it for him."

In a quiet but clear voice someone said: "I may be mistaken, of course." It was the professor. Everyone

addressed him as 'Professor'. I don't even know his name. He must have been in his sixties, a figure of slight built, but tough. He seemed just as much at ease here as he would have been in an Oxford lecture theatre.

A.M.T. encouraged him. "Yes, Professor? What do you think about the matter?"

"It strikes me as odd to think that those Bedouins agreed to be hired for such a mean crime. Bedouins are a proud people. They live in the desert and value their independence. It is inconceivable that they would work for people from the cities if they do not suffer deprivation, let alone steal for them. Stealing is a most dishonourable act for a Bedouin."

Doddington got het up about this. "Professor, forget your books for a moment, will you? They stole the sword! They came into our camp and took it. How can you claim that stealing isn't stealing?"

I thought Doddington had a point, but there was something curious about the events.

"Gentlemen," I said. "I am concerned about the situation. We can only guess as to the motives of the three men. But it is a fact that someone followed us through the desert for two days, and all they were interested in was Doddington's sword. I think we cannot let the matter rest, but must find out what is behind this."

A.M.T. eyed me suspiciously. "What exactly are you proposing?"

"We need to leave this place immediately and go north for at least two days."

"But Faiyum lies to the southwest", she said angrily.

"I know it does. Everybody knows that. And the people who have been following us since Cairo know we are going southwest. We need to do something unexpected, and that is neither going back nor continuing on our route."

"Fine. And how does that help?"

I am sure that she will accuse me forever of sabotaging her expedition.

"In the meantime, our guide should go back to Cairo and try to find out what is going on. Mr Halesworth, I think you are the one of us who is most fluent in the Arabic language. So I was wondering if you would agree to go with him. The prospect of your finding out anything are not great, admittedly, but we should at least try rather than journey on in ignorance. We will pick a town on the Nile where we will wait for you to join us again."

Halesworth nodded. "I am willing to agree to this."

Doddington still had doubts. "Wait a second! How will we get to this town on the Nile?"

"As I said," I explained. "We will agree on one that is north of here, and then we will go there directly."

"Yes, but how will we be able to go there if our guide is sent on that reconnaissance mission of yours?"

I pointed at A.M.T. "We still have Mrs Thane as the leader of this expedition."

She gave a start, looked at the sky and then pointed vaguely in a northwestern direction.

It was enough to convince Doddington. "Very well then. Let's start packing." He turned around and yelled at his valet, "What are you waiting for?"

2nd August 1810, Alexandria

Everyone is downcast, most of all A.M.T., which comes as no surprise considering the last few days.

Mr Halesworth and our guide had gone back to Cairo and have met us again a few days later, just as we had planned. They were indeed successful in finding out more about Doddington's sword.

The sword is old, really old, i.e. several centuries. It belonged to a Bedouin clan (I need to ask Mr Halesworth again for the name) for generations. About two years ago it was stolen. It is not clear by whom. Some blamed other Bedouins, which is unlikely according to Mr Halesworth. He believes the sword was stolen by French soldiers, who then sold it to merchants in the Cairo area.

The Bedouin sheik spared no efforts to find the sword and get it back. When the merchants became aware of the sheik's activities, they tried to get rid of it for fear of the sheik's wrath. They concluded that the most rewarding solution would be to sell it to an unsuspecting foreigner.

Doddington was furious. "This is outrageous! I will not have anyone blame me for dealing with stolen goods."

"This is not the issue," Mr Halesworth explained. "The sheik does not blame you for buying the sword from that merchant. He blames you for stealing it from his people the night they came into our camp."

Doddington was incredulous. "What kind of moonling is this sheik? He sends those fellows to steal the sword and accuses me of stealing?"

"When they took the sword, they did not consider this stealing. In their view, they took back what is rightly theirs. But your pursuing them and seizing the sword again was stealing."

Doddington was too flabbergasted to speak coherently. "They ... not ... but I ..."

The professor chuckled. "It sounds a bit twisted, but is completely logical from their point of view."

"Completely logical?" Doddington bellowed, but then forced himself to take a deep breath and continued more calmly, "All right. Well. We will speak with them and put it right. I will give them the sword, as a gift. Let them have it. Then we can move on."

The professor chuckled again. "I think there may be another problem."

"What now?" Doddington asked exasperated.

"The professor is right," said Mr Halesworth. "One of the Bedouins was killed when you sto-, when you took the sword. The sheik now claims to have a *thar* against you, a kind of vendetta."

"Quite flattering," said Doddington. "But he won't hold a grudge against me forever, will he?"

The professor made a step forward. "Bedouins are a people of the desert," he lectured. "No Bedouin can survive individually, but only in a community. That is why they value their family and their clan very highly. When an outsider harms or kills one of their clan, the

others will not rest until the assault has been avenged. Retribution must be sought 'eye for an eye', as the Quran prescribes."

"I did not kill anyone!" Doddington said. "No offence, Hawkridge."

"None taken," Hawkridge said.

"Just a moment!" A.M.T. interrupted. "Mr Halesworth, are you saying that the Bedouins want to kill Lord Doddington? And if they find out that it was actually Mr Hawkridge who shot the poor man, they are going to kill him as well?"

"Not quite," said Mr Halesworth.

"That's a relief!" she said.

Mr Halesworth cleared his throat. "The situation is even more severe. As several people were involved in the – in their view – robbery of the sword and murder of the Bedouin, the sheik has decided to extend the *thar* to our whole party. In other words," he paused for a moment, "he has declared war on every one of us."

Silence followed this announcement.

After a while, Doddington said, "I have never before been declared war on."

"This is most inconvenient," A.M.T. called out. "How can we carry on with the expedition?"

This question was discussed at length. The professor and the gentlemen from the British Museum agreed that it would be impossible to settle the conflict peacefully. Neither apologies nor money would be sufficient. The Bedouins knew we were headed for Faiyum and would be expecting us there. They were able to muster over a

hundred well-armed horsemen. We were obviously no match for them. If we stayed anywhere in Egypt, the sheik would find out sooner or later – and send his men.

We began our return journey the next morning.

We are at an inn near the Western port of Alexandria now. The atmosphere is strained. A.M.T. refuses to speak with Doddington. Our mounts and most of the equipment have been sold. Roxwell is at the port looking for a ship that will take us home.

5th September 1810, London

We arrived in London yesterday. Doddington and I had agreed to meet at White's at 10 o'clock today. Normally, we would have been welcomed back excitedly by the other club members. But word had got around that there is no winner to our wager yet, so there was no one to be congratulated. Doddington and I arrived within a few minutes of each other. The others restrained their curiosity, and we were left alone.

"Here we are," Doddington said lost in thought.

"Then let's find out what the wager was about."

"Yes."

"And we agree that whatever the book says shall be binding for both of us."

"Definitely."

"Even if differs from what you or I remember or think we remember?"

"Absolutely. The wager shall be what the book says. Nothing else."

The Book of the Club had been laid out for us. Doddington opened the book, turned the pages, and then we both looked at a scrawl that was hardly legible.

"I can't read this," Doddington said.

I pointed with my finger. "Well, this is the date --"

"I know this is the date," he interrupted me irritably, "but what is a 'Coddollipter'?"

"I think that means 'Lord Doddington'."

"Right. Of course." He coughed. "'Lord Doddington, Lord Mayford, wager: reaching the Pyramids first.' And that's all there is."

We looked at each other.

Doddington frowned. "I don't remember that this was what we agreed on."

"No, it is not at all what we said."

"But should we accept it?"

"We agreed that whatever the book says shall apply. Do you have another suggestion?"

"No, I don't. And it may not be what we meant back then, but at least its meaning is clear and straightforward."

"Indeed it is," I said. "And we have both been to the Pyramids."

"But who of us reached them first?"

I tried to remember. "We went there for a day, coming from Cairo."

"Yes, we were all riding together. The group split up only after we had arrived and found a place for the mounts."

"Would you say we have done what is required according to the book?"

"Apparently."

"Shall we agree that it is a draw?" I suggested.

He nodded. "A draw."

We shook hands.

"Let's have a drink," I suggested.

We sat down at a table and ordered drinks.

"Funny affair, all that," he said dreamily. "I feel sorry for Mrs Thane. So much effort without any result. I still have the sword at least. Fine piece. I would have given it to her, but she declined. She is very disappointed, of course. Hasn't given up on her expeditions, though. In fact, she told me that her next –"

"Stop it, Doddington!" I shouted. "I don't want to hear anything about it!"