АРТУР КОНАН ДОЙЛ

A DESERT DRAMA: BEING THE TRAGEDY OF THE "KOROSKO"

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Содержание

Arthur Conan Doyle
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PREFACE

This book has been materially enlarged and altered since its appearance in serial form

A. Conan Doyle

October 17, 1897

A DESERT DRAMA

CHAPTER I

The public may possibly wonder why it is that they have never heard in the papers of the fate of the passengers of the __Korosko__. In these days of universal press agencies, responsive to the slightest stimulus, it may well seem incredible that an international incident of such importance should remain so long unchronicled. Suffice it that there were very valid reasons, both of a personal and political nature, for holding it back. The facts were well known to a good number of people at the time, and some version of them did actually appear in a provincial paper, but was generally discredited. They have now been thrown into narrative form, the incidents having been collated from the sworn statements of Colonel Cochrane Cochrane, of the Army and Navy Club, and from the letters of Miss Adams, of Boston, Mass. These have been supplemented by the evidence of Captain Archer, of the Egyptian Camel Corps, as given before the secret Government inquiry at Cairo. Mr. James Stephens has refused to put his version of the matter into writing, but as these proofs have been submitted to him, and no correction or deletion has been made in them, it may be supposed that he has not succeeded in detecting any grave misstatement of fact, and that any objection which he may have to their publication depends rather upon private and personal scruples.

The __Korosko__, a turtle-bottomed, round-bowed stern-

wheeler, with a 30-inch draught and the lines of a flat-iron, started upon the 13th of February, in the year 1895, from Shellal, at the head of the first cataract, bound for Wady Haifa. I have a passenger card for the trip, which I hereby produce:

S. W. "*Korosko*," February 13TH.

PASSENGERS.
Colonel Cochrane Cochrane London
Mr. Cecil Brown London
John H. Headingly Boston, USA
Miss Adams Boston, USA
Miss S. Adams Worcester, Mass, USA
Mons Fardet Paris
Mr. and Mrs. Belmont Dublin
James Stephens Manchester
Rev. John Stuart Birmingham
Mrs. Shlesinger, nurse and child Florence

This was the party as it started from Shellal with the intention of travelling up the two hundred miles of Nubian Nile which lie between the first and the second cataract.

It is a singular country, this Nubia. Varying in breadth from a few miles to as many yards (for the name is only applied to the narrow portion which is capable of cultivation), it extends in a thin, green, palm-fringed strip upon either side of the broad coffee-coloured river. Beyond it there stretches on the Libyan bank a savage and illimitable desert, extending to the whole breadth of Africa. On the other side an equally desolate wilderness is bounded only by the distant Red Sea. Between

these two huge and barren expanses Nubia writhes like a green sandworm along the course of the river. Here and there it disappears altogether, and the Nile runs between black and sun-cracked hills, with the orange drift-sand lying like glaciers in their valleys. Everywhere one sees traces of vanished races and submerged civilisations. Grotesque graves dot the hills or stand up against the sky-line: pyramidal graves, tumulus graves, rock graves, – everywhere, graves. And, occasionally, as the boat rounds a rocky point, one sees a deserted city up above, – houses, walls, battlements, with the sun shining through the empty window squares. Sometimes you learn that it has been Roman, sometimes Egyptian, sometimes all record of its name or origin has been absolutely lost, You ask yourself in amazement why any race should build in so uncouth a solitude, and you find it difficult to accept the theory that this has only been of value as a guard-house to the richer country down below, and that these frequent cities have been so many fortresses to hold off the wild and predatory men of the south. But whatever be their explanation, be it a fierce neighbour, or be it a climatic change, there they stand, these grim and silent cities, and up on the hills you can see the graves of their people, like the port-holes of a man-of-war. It is through this weird, dead country that the tourists smoke and gossip and flirt as they pass up to the Egyptian frontier.

The passengers of the *Korosko* formed a merry party, for most of them had travelled up together from Cairo to Assouan,

and even Anglo-Saxon ice thaws rapidly upon the Nile. They were fortunate in being without the single disagreeable person who in these small boats is sufficient to mar the enjoyment of the whole party. On a vessel which is little more than a large steam launch, the bore, the cynic, or the grumbler holds the company at his mercy. But the *Korosko* was free from anything of the kind. Colonel Cochrane Cochrane was one of those officers whom the British Government, acting upon a large system of averages, declares at a certain age to be incapable of further service, and who demonstrate the worth of such a system by spending their declining years in exploring Morocco, or shooting lions in Somaliland. He was a dark, straight, aquiline man, with a courteously deferential manner, but a steady, questioning eye; very neat in his dress and precise in his habits, a gentleman to the tips of his trim fingernails. In his Anglo-Saxon dislike to effusiveness he had cultivated a self-contained manner which was apt at first acquaintance to be repellant, and he seemed to those who really knew him to be at some pains to conceal the kind heart and human emotions which influenced his actions. It was respect rather than affection which he inspired among his fellow-travellers, for they felt, like all who had ever met him, that he was a man with whom acquaintance was unlikely to ripen into a friendship, though a friendship when once attained would be an unchanging and inseparable part of himself. He wore a grizzled military moustache, but his hair was singularly black for a man of his years. He made no allusion in his conversation to the

numerous campaigns in which he had distinguished himself, and the reason usually given for his reticence was that they dated back to such early Victorian days that he had to sacrifice his military glory at the shrine of his perennial youth.

Mr. Cecil Brown – to take the names in the chance order in which they appear upon the passenger list – was a young diplomatist from a Continental Embassy, a man slightly tainted with the Oxford manner, and erring upon the side of unnatural and inhuman refinement, but full of interesting talk and cultured thought. He had a sad, handsome face, a small wax-tipped moustache, a low voice and a listless manner, which was relieved by a charming habit of suddenly lighting up into a rapid smile and gleam when anything caught his fancy. An acquired cynicism was eternally crushing and overlying his natural youthful enthusiasms, and he ignored what was obvious while expressing keen appreciation for what seemed to the average man to be either trivial or unhealthy. He chose Walter Pater for his travelling author, and sat all day, reserved but affable, under the awning, with his novel and his sketch-book upon a campstool beside him. His personal dignity prevented him from making advances to others, but if they chose to address him, they found him a courteous and amiable companion.

The Americans formed a group by themselves. John H. Headingly was a New Englander, a graduate of Harvard, who was completing his education by a tour round the world. He stood for the best type of young American, – quick, observant, serious,

eager for knowledge, and fairly free from prejudice, with a fine ballast of unsectarian but earnest religious feeling, which held him steady amid all the sudden gusts of youth. He had less of the appearance and more of the reality of culture than the young Oxford diplomatist, for he had keener emotions though less exact knowledge. Miss Adams and Miss Sadie Adams were aunt and niece, the former a little, energetic, hard-featured Bostonian old-maid, with a huge surplus of unused love behind her stern and swarthy features. She had never been from home before, and she was now busy upon the self-imposed task of bringing the East up to the standard of Massachusetts. She had hardly landed in Egypt before she realised that the country needed putting to rights, and since the conviction struck her she had been very fully occupied. The saddle-galled donkeys, the starved pariah dogs, the flies round the eyes of the babies, the naked children, the importunate begging, the ragged, untidy women, – they were all challenges to her conscience, and she plunged in bravely at her work of reformation. As she could not speak a word of the language, however, and was unable to make any of the delinquents understand what it was that she wanted, her passage up the Nile left the immemorial East very much as she had found it, but afforded a good deal of sympathetic amusement to her fellow-travellers. No one enjoyed her efforts more than her niece, Sadie, who shared with Mrs. Belmont the distinction of being the most popular person upon the boat. She was very young, – fresh from Smith College, – and she still possessed many both

of the virtues and of the faults of a child. She had the frankness, the trusting confidence, the innocent straightforwardness, the high spirits, and also the loquacity and the want of reverence. But even her faults caused amusement, and if she had preserved many of the characteristics of a clever child, she was none the less a tall and handsome woman, who looked older than her years on account of that low curve of the hair over the ears, and that fulness of bodice and skirt which Mr. Gibson has either initiated or imitated. The whisk of those skirts, and the frank incisive voice and pleasant, catching laugh were familiar and welcome sounds on board of the *Korosko*. Even the rigid Colonel softened into geniality, and the Oxford-bred diplomatist forgot to be unnatural with Miss Sadie Adams as a companion.

The other passengers may be dismissed more briefly. Some were interesting, some neutral, and all amiable. Monsieur Fardet was a good-natured but argumentative Frenchman, who held the most decided views as to the deep machinations of Great Britain and the illegality of her position in Egypt. Mr. Belmont was an iron-grey, sturdy Irishman, famous as an astonishingly good long-range rifle-shot, who had carried off nearly every prize which Wimbledon or Bisley had to offer. With him was his wife, a very charming and refined woman, full of the pleasant playfulness of her country. Mrs. Shiesinger was a middle-aged widow, quiet and soothing, with her thoughts all taken up by her six-year-old child, as a mother's thoughts are likely to be in a boat which has an open rail for a bulwark. The Reverend John Stuart was a Non-

conformist minister from Birmingham, – either a Presbyterian or a Congregationalist, – a man of immense stoutness, slow and torpid in his ways, but blessed with a considerable fund of homely humour, which made him, I am told, a very favourite preacher and an effective speaker from advanced radical platforms.

Finally, there was Mr. James Stephens, a Manchester solicitor (junior partner of Hickson, Ward, and Stephens), who was travelling to shake off the effects of an attack of influenza. Stephens was a man who, in the course of thirty years, had worked himself up from cleaning the firm's windows to managing its business. For most of that long time he had been absolutely immersed in dry, technical work, living with the one idea of satisfying old clients and attracting new ones, until his mind and soul had become as formal and precise as the laws which he expounded. A fine and sensitive nature was in danger of being as warped as a busy city man's is liable to become. His work had become an engrained habit, and, being a bachelor, he had hardly an interest in life to draw him away from it, so that his soul was being gradually bricked up like the body of a mediæval nun. But at last there came this kindly illness, and Nature hustled James Stephens out of his groove, and sent him into the broad world far away from roaring Manchester and his shelves full of calf-skin authorities. At first he resented it deeply. Everything seemed trivial to him compared to his own petty routine. But gradually his eyes were opened, and he began dimly to see that it was his work which was trivial when compared to this wonderful,

varied, inexplicable world of which he was so ignorant. Vaguely he realised that the interruption to his career might be more important than the career itself. All sorts of new interests took, possession of him; and the middle-aged lawyer developed an after-glow of that youth which had been wasted among his books. His character was too formed to admit of his being anything but dry and precise in his ways, and a trifle pedantic in his mode of speech; but he read and thought and observed, scoring his "Baedeker" with underlinings and annotations as he had once done his "Prideaux's Commentaries." He had travelled up from Cairo with the party, and had contracted a friendship with Miss Adams and her niece. The young American girl, with her chatter, her audacity, and her constant flow of high spirits, amused and interested him, and she in turn felt a mixture of respect and of pity for his knowledge and his limitations. So they became good friends, and people smiled to see his clouded face and her sunny one bending over the same guide-book.

The little *Korosko* puffed and spluttered her way up the river, kicking up the white water behind her, and making more noise and fuss over her five knots an hour than an Atlantic liner on a record voyage. On deck, under the thick awning, sat her little family of passengers, and every few hours she eased down and sidled up to the bank to allow them to visit one more of that innumerable succession of temples. The remains, however, grow more modern as one ascends from Cairo, and travellers who have sated themselves at Gizeh and Sakara with the contemplation

of the very oldest buildings which the hands of man have constructed, become impatient of temples which are hardly older than the Christian era. Ruins which would be gazed upon with wonder and veneration in any other country are hardly noticed in Egypt. The tourists viewed with languid interest the half-Greek art of the Nubian bas-reliefs; they climbed the hill of *Korosko* to see the sun rise over the savage Eastern desert; they were moved to wonder by the great shrine of Abou-Simbel, where some old race has hollowed out a mountain as if it were a cheese; and, finally, upon the evening of the fourth day of their travels they arrived at Wady Haifa, the frontier garrison town, some few hours after they were due, on account of a small mishap in the engine-room. The next morning was to be devoted to an expedition to the famous rock of Abousir, from which a great view may be obtained of the second cataract. At eight-thirty, as the passengers sat on deck after dinner, Mansoor, the dragoman, half Copt half Syrian, came forward, according to the nightly custom, to announce the programme for the morrow.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said he, plunging boldly into the rapid but broken stream of his English, "to-morrow you will remember not to forget to rise when the gong strikes you for to compress the journey before twelve o'clock. Having arrived at the place where the donkeys expect us, we shall ride five miles over the desert, passing a very fine temple of Ammon-ra which dates itself from the eighteenth dynasty upon the way, and so reach the celebrated pulpit rock of Abou-sir. The pulpit rock is

supposed to have been called so because it is a rock like a pulpit. When you have reached it you will know that you are on the very edge of civilisation, and that very little more will take you into the country of the Dervishes, which will be obvious to you at the top. Having passed the summit, you will perceive the full extremity of the second cataract, embracing wild natural beauties of the most dreadful variety. Here all very famous people carve their names, – and so you will carve your names also."

Mansoor waited expectantly for a titter, and bowed to it when it arrived. "You will then return to Wady Haifa, and there remain two hours to suspect (sp.) the Camel Corps, including the grooming of the beasts, and the bazaar before returning, so I wish you a very happy good-night." There was a gleam of his white teeth in the lamplight, and then his long, dark petticoats, his short English cover-coat, and his red tarboosh vanished successively down the ladder. The low buzz of conversation which had been suspended by his coming broke out anew.

"I'm relying on you, Mr. Stephens, to tell me all about Abousir," said Miss Sadie Adams. "I do like to know what I am looking at right there at the time, and not six hours afterwards in my state-room. I haven't got Abou-Simbel and the wall pictures straight in my mind yet, though I saw them yesterday."

"I never hope to keep up with it," said her aunt. "When I am safe back in Commonwealth Avenue, and there's no dragoman to hustle me around, I'll have time to read about it all, and then I expect I shall begin to enthuse and want to come right back

again. But it's just too good of you, Mr. Stephens, to try and keep us informed."

"I thought that you might wish precise information, and so I prepared a small digest of the matter," said Stephens, handing a slip of paper to Miss Sadie. She looked at it in the light of the deck lamp, and broke into her low, hearty laugh.

"*Re* Abousir," she read; "now, what *do* you mean by '*re*,' Mr. Stephens? You put '*re* Rameses the Second' on the last paper you gave me."

"It is a habit I have acquired, Miss Sadie," said Stephens; "it is the custom in the legal profession when they make a memo."

"Make what, Mr. Stephens?"

"A memo a memorandum, you know. We put *re* so-and-so to show what it is about."

"I suppose it's a good short way," said Miss Sadie, "but it feels queer somehow when applied to scenery or to dead Egyptian kings. '*Re* Cheops,' – doesn't that strike you as funny?"

"No, I can't say that it does," said Stephens.

"I wonder if it is true that the English have less humour than the Americans, or whether it's just another kind of humour," said the girl. She had a quiet, abstracted way of talking as if she were thinking aloud. "I used to imagine they had less, and yet, when you come to think of it, Dickens and Thackeray and Barrie, and so many other of the humourists we admire most, are Britishers. Besides, I never in all my days heard people laugh so hard as in that London theatre. There was a man behind us, and every time

he laughed auntie looked round to see if a door had opened, he made such a draught. But you have some funny expressions, Mr. Stephens!"

"What else strikes you as funny, Miss Sadie?"

"Well, when you sent me the temple ticket and the little map, you began your letter, 'Enclosed, please find,' and then at the bottom, in brackets, you had '2 enclo.'"

"That is the usual form in business."

"Yes, in business," said Sadie, demurely, and there was a silence.

"There's one thing I wish," remarked Miss Adams, in the hard, metallic voice with which she disguised her softness of heart, "and that is, that I could see the Legislature of this country and lay a few cold-drawn facts in front of them, I'd make a platform of my own, Mr. Stephens, and run a party on my ticket. A Bill for the compulsory use of eyewash would be one of my planks, and another would be for the abolition of those Yashmak veil things which turn a woman into a bale of cotton goods with a pair of eyes looking out of it."

"I never could think why they wore them," said Sadie; "until one day I saw one with her veil lifted. Then I knew."

"They make me tired, those women," cried Miss Adams, wrathfully. "One might as well try to preach duty and decency and cleanliness to a line of bolsters. Why, good land, it was only yesterday at Abou-Simbel, Mr. Stephens, I was passing one of their houses, – if you can call a mud-pie like that a house, –

and I saw two of the children at the door with the usual crust of flies round their eyes, and great holes in their poor little blue gowns! So I got off my donkey, and I turned up my sleeves, and I washed their faces well with my handkerchief, and sewed up the rents, – for in this country I would as soon think of going ashore without my needle-case as without my white umbrella, Mr. Stephens. Then as I warmed on the job I got into the room, – such a room! – and I packed the folks out of it, and I fairly did the chores as if I had been the hired help. I've seen no more of that temple of Abou-Simbel than if I had never left Boston; but, my sakes, I saw more dust and mess than you would think they could crowd into a house the size of a Newport bathing-hut. From the time I pinned up my skirt until I came out, with my face the colour of that smoke-stack, wasn't more than an hour, or maybe an hour and a half, but I had that house as clean and fresh as a new pine-wood box. I had a *New York Herald* with me, and I lined their shelf with paper for them. Well, Mr. Stephens, when I had done washing my hands outside, I came past the door again, and there were those two children sitting on the stoop with their eyes full of flies, and all just the same as ever, except that each had a little paper cap made out of the *New York Herald* upon his head. But, say, Sadie, it's going on to ten o'clock, and tomorrow an early excursion."

"It's just too beautiful, this purple sky and the great silver stars," said Sadie. "Look at the silent desert and the black shadows of the hills. It's grand, but it's terrible, too; and then

when you think that we really *are*, as that dragoman said just now, on the very end of civilisation, and with nothing but savagery and bloodshed down there where the Southern Cross is twinkling so prettily, why, it's like standing on the beautiful edge of a live volcano."

"Shucks, Sadie, don't talk like that, child," said the older woman, nervously. "It's enough to scare any one to listen to you."

"Well, but don't you feel it yourself, Auntie? Look at that great desert stretching away and away until it is lost in the shadows. Hear the sad whisper of the wind across it! It's just the most solemn thing that ever I saw in my life."

"I'm glad we've found something that will make you solemn, my dear," said her Aunt. "I've sometimes thought – Sakes alive, what's that?"

From somewhere amongst the hill shadows upon the other side of the river there had risen a high shrill whimpering, rising and swelling, to end in a long weary wail.

"It's only a jackal, Miss Adams," said Stephens. "I heard one when we went out to see the Sphinx by moonlight."

But the American lady had risen, and her face showed that her nerves had been ruffled.

"If I had my time over again I wouldn't have come past Assouan," said she. "I can't think what possessed me to bring you all the way up here, Sadie. Your mother will think that I am clean crazy, and I'd never dare to look her in the eye if anything went wrong with us. I've seen all I want to see of this river, and

all I ask now is to be back at Cairo again."

"Why, Auntie," cried the girl, "it isn't like you to be faint-hearted."

"Well, I don't know how it is, Sadie, but I feel a bit unstrung, and that beast caterwauling over yonder was just more than I could put up with. There's one consolation, we are scheduled to be on our way home to-morrow, after we've seen this one rock or temple, or whatever it is. I'm full up of rocks and temples, Mr. Stephens. I shouldn't mope if I never saw another. Come, Sadie! Good-night!"

"Good-night! Good-night, Miss Adams!" and the two ladies passed down to their cabins.

Monsieur Fardet was chatting, in a subdued voice, with Headingly, the young Harvard graduate, bending forward confidentially between the whiffs of his cigarette.

"Dervishes, Mister Headingly!" said he, speaking excellent English, but separating his syllables as a Frenchman will. "There are no Dervishes. They do not exist."

"Why, I thought the woods were full of them," said the American.

Monsieur Fardet glanced across to where the red core of Colonel Cochrane's cigar was glowing through the darkness.

"You are an American, and you do not like the English," he whispered. "It is perfectly comprehended upon the Continent that the Americans are opposed to the English."

"Well," said Headingly, with his slow, deliberate manner, "I

won't say that we have not our tiffs, and there are some of our people – mostly of Irish stock – who are always mad with England; but the most of us have a kindly thought for the mother country. You see, they may be aggravating folk sometimes, but after all they are our *own* folk, and we can't wipe that off the slate."

"*Eh bien!*" said the Frenchman. "At least I can say to you what I could not without offence say to these others. And I repeat that there *are* no Dervishes. They were an invention of Lord Cromer in the year 1885."

"You don't say!" cried Headingly.

"It is well known in Paris, and has been exposed in *La Patrie* and other of our so well-informed papers."

"But this is colossal," said Headingly.

"Do you mean to tell me, Monsieur Fardet, that the siege of Khartoum and the death of Gordon and the rest of it was just one great bluff?"

"I will not deny that there was an emeute, but it was local, you understand, and now long forgotten. Since then there has been profound peace in the Soudan."

"But I have heard of raids, Monsieur Fardet, and I've read of battles, too, when the Arabs tried to invade Egypt. It was only two days ago that we passed Toski, where the dragoman said there had been a fight. Is that all bluff also?"

"Pah, my friend, you do not know the English. You look at them as you see them with their pipes and their contented faces,

and you say, 'Now, these are good, simple folk who will never hurt any one.' But all the time they are thinking and watching and planning. 'Here is Egypt weak,' they cry. '*Allons!*' and down they swoop like a gull upon a crust. 'You have no right there,' says the world. 'Come out of it!' But England has already begun to tidy everything, just like the good Miss Adams when she forces her way into the house of an Arab. 'Come out,' says the world. 'Certainly,' says England; 'just wait one little minute until I have made everything nice and proper.' So the world waits for a year or so, and then it says once again, 'Come out.' 'Just wait a little,' says England; 'there is trouble at Khartoum, and when I have set that all right I shall be very glad to come out.' So they wait until it is all over, and then again they say, 'Come out.' 'How can I come out,' says England, 'when there are still raids and battles going on? If we were to leave, Egypt would be run over.' 'But there are no raids,' says the world. 'Oh, are there not?' says England, and then within a week sure enough the papers are full of some new raid of Dervishes. We are not all blind, Mister Headingly. We understand very well how such things can be done. A few Bedouins, a little backsheesh, some blank cartridges, and, behold – a raid!"

"Well, well," said the American, "I'm glad to know the rights of this business, for it has often puzzled me. But what does England get out of it?"

"She gets the country, monsieur."

"I see. You mean, for example, that there is a favourable tariff

for British goods?"

"No, monsieur; it is the same for all."

"Well, then, she gives the contracts to Britishers?"

"Precisely, monsieur."

"For example, the railroad that they are building right through the country, the one that runs alongside the river, that would be a valuable contract for the British?"

Monsieur Fardet was an honest man, if an imaginative one.

"It is a French company, monsieur, which holds the railway contract," said he.

The American was puzzled.

"They don't seem to get much for their trouble," said he. "Still, of course, there must be some indirect pull somewhere. For example, Egypt no doubt has to pay and keep all those red-coats in Cairo."

"Egypt, monsieur! No, they are paid by England."

"Well, I suppose they know their own business best, but they seem to me to take a great deal of trouble, and to get mighty little in exchange. If they don't mind keeping order and guarding the frontier, with a constant war against the Dervishes on their hands, I don't know why any one should object. I suppose no one denies that the prosperity of the country has increased enormously since they came. The revenue returns show that. They tell me, also, that the poorer folks have justice, which they never had before."

"What are they doing here at all?" cried the Frenchman, angrily. "Let them go back to their island. We cannot have them

all over the world."

"Well, certainly, to us Americans who live all in our own land it does seem strange how you European nations are for ever slopping over into some other country which was not meant for you. It's easy for us to talk, of course, for we have still got room and to spare for all our people. When we start pushing each other over the edge we shall have to start annexing also. But at present just here in North Africa there is Italy in Abyssinia, and England in Egypt, and France in Algiers – "

"France!" cried Monsieur Fardet. "Algiers belongs to France. You laugh, monsieur. I have the honour to wish you a very good-night." He rose from his seat, and walked off, rigid with outraged patriotism, to his cabin.

CHAPTER II

The young American hesitated for a little, debating in his mind whether he should not go down and post up the daily record of his impressions which he kept for his home-staying sister. But the cigars of Colonel Cochrane and of Cecil Brown were still twinkling in the far corner of the deck, and the student was acquisitive in the search of information. He did not quite know how to lead up to the matter, but the Colonel very soon did it for him.

"Come on, Headingly," said he, pushing a camp-stool in his direction. "This is the place for an antidote. I see that Fardet has been pouring politics into your ear."

"I can always recognise the confidential stoop of his shoulders when he discusses *la haute politique*" said the dandy diplomatist. "But what a sacrilege upon a night like this! What a nocturne in blue and silver might be suggested by that moon rising above the desert. There is a movement in one of Mendelssohn's songs which seems to embody it all, – a sense of vastness, of repetition, the cry of the wind over an interminable expanse. The subtler emotions which cannot be translated into words are still to be hinted at by chords and harmonies."

"It seems wilder and more savage than ever to-night," remarked the American. "It gives me the same feeling of pitiless force that the Atlantic does upon a cold, dark, winter day.

Perhaps it is the knowledge that we are right there on the very edge of any kind of law and order. How far do you suppose that we are from any Dervishes, Colonel Cochrane?"

"Well, on the Arabian side," said the Colonel, "we have the Egyptian fortified camp of Sarras about forty miles to the south of us. Beyond that are sixty miles of very wild country before you would come to the Dervish post at Akasheh. On this other side, however, there is nothing between us and them."

"Abousir is on this side, is it not?"

"Yes. That is why the excursion to the Abousir Rock has been forbidden for the last year. But things are quieter now."

"What is to prevent them from coming down on that side?"

"Absolutely nothing," said Cecil Brown, in his listless voice.

"Nothing, except their fears. The coming, of course, would be absolutely simple. The difficulty would lie in the return. They might find it hard to get back if their camels were spent and the Haifa garrison with their beasts fresh got on their track. They know it as well as we do, and it has kept them from trying."

"It isn't safe to reckon upon a Dervish's fears," remarked Brown. "We must always bear in mind that they are not amenable to the same motives as other people. Many of them are anxious to meet death, and all of them are absolute, uncompromising believers in destiny. They exist as a *reductio ad absurdum* of all bigotry, – a proof of how surely it leads towards blank barbarism."

"You think these people are a real menace to Egypt?" asked

the American. “There seems from what I have heard to be some difference of opinion about it. Monsieur Fardet, for example, does not seem to think that the danger is a very pressing one.”

“I am not a rich man,” Colonel Cochrane answered, after a little pause, “but I am prepared to lay all I am worth that within three years of the British officers being withdrawn, the Dervishes would be upon the Mediterranean. Where would the civilisation of Egypt be? where would the hundreds of millions be which have been invested in this country? where the monuments which all nations look upon as most precious memorials of the past?”

“Come now, Colonel,” cried Headingly, laughing, “surely you don’t mean that they would shift the pyramids?”

“You cannot foretell what they would do. There is no iconoclast in the world like an extreme Mohammedan. Last time they overran this country they burned the Alexandrian library. You know that all representations of the human features are against the letter of the Koran. A statue is always an irreligious object in their eyes. What do these fellows care for the sentiment of Europe? The more they could offend it the more delighted they would be. Down would go the Sphinx, the Colossi, the Statues of Abou-Simbel, – as the saints went down in England before Cromwell’s troopers.”

“Well now,” said Headingly, in his slow, thoughtful fashion, “suppose I grant you that the Dervishes could overrun Egypt, and suppose also that you English are holding them out, what I’m never done asking is, what reason have you for spending all these

millions of dollars and the lives of so many of your men? What do you get out of it, more than France gets, or Germany, or any other country, that runs no risk and never lays out a cent?"

"There are a good many Englishmen who are asking themselves that question," remarked Cecil Brown. "It's my opinion that we have been the policemen of the world long enough. We policed the seas for pirates and slavers. Now we police the land for Dervishes and brigands and every sort of danger to civilisation. There is never a mad priest or a witch doctor, or a firebrand of any sort on this planet, who does not report his appearance by sniping the nearest British officer. One tires of it at last. If a Kurd breaks loose in Asia Minor, the world wants to know why Great Britain does not keep him in order. If there is a military mutiny in Egypt, or a Jehad in the Soudan, it is still Great Britain who has to set it right. And all to an accompaniment of curses such as the policeman gets when he seizes a ruffian among his pals. We get hard knocks and no thanks, and why should we do it? Let Europe do its own dirty work."

"Well," said Colonel Cochrane, crossing his legs and leaning forward with the decision of a man who has definite opinions, "I don't at all agree with you, Brown, and I think that to advocate such a course is to take a very limited view of our national duties. I think that behind national interests and diplomacy and all that there lies a great guiding force, – a Providence, in fact, – which is for ever getting the best out of each nation and using it for

the good of the whole. When a nation ceases to respond, it is time that she went into hospital for a few centuries, like Spain or Greece, – the virtue has gone out of her. A man or a nation is not here upon this earth merely to do what is pleasant and profitable. It is often called upon to carry out what is unpleasant and unprofitable; but if it is obviously right, it is mere shirking not to undertake it."

Headingly nodded approvingly.

"Each has its own mission. Germany is predominant in abstract thought; France in literature, art, and grace. But we and you, – for the English-speakers are all in the same boat, however much the *New York Sun* may scream over it, – we and you have among our best men a higher conception of moral sense and public duty than is to be found in any other people. Now, these are the two qualities which are needed for directing a weaker race. You can't help them by abstract thought or by graceful art, but only by that moral sense which will hold the scales of Justice even, and keep itself free from every taint of corruption. That is how we rule India. We came there by a kind of natural law, like air rushing into a vacuum. All over the world, against our direct interests and our deliberate intentions, we are drawn into the same thing. And it will happen to you also. The pressure of destiny will force you to administer the whole of America from Mexico to the Horn."

Headingly whistled.

"Our Jingoes would be pleased to hear you, Colonel

Cochrane," said he. "They'd vote you into our Senate and make you one of the Committee on Foreign Relations."

"The world is small, and it grows smaller every day. It's a single organic body, and one spot of gangrene is enough to vitiate the whole. There's no room upon it for dishonest, defaulting, tyrannical, irresponsible Governments. As long as they exist they will always be centres of trouble and of danger. But there are many races which appear to be so incapable of improvement that we can never hope to get a good Government out of them. What is to be done, then? The former device of Providence in such a case was extermination by some more virile stock. An Attila or a Tamerlane pruned off the weaker branch. Now, we have a more merciful substitution of rulers, or even of mere advice from a more advanced race. That is the case with the Central Asian Khanates and with the protected States of India. If the work has to be done, and if we are the best fitted for the work, then I think that it would be a cowardice and a crime to shirk it."

"But who is to decide whether it is a fitting case for your interference?" objected the American. "A predatory country could grab every other land in the world upon such a pretext."

"Events – inexorable, inevitable events – will decide it. Take this Egyptian business as an example. In 1881 there was nothing in this world further from the minds of our people than any interference with Egypt; and yet 1882 left us in possession of the country. There was never any choice in the chain of events. A massacre in the streets of Alexandria, and the

mounting of guns to drive out our fleet – which was there, you understand, in fulfilment of solemn treaty obligations – led to the bombardment. The bombardment led to a landing to save the city from destruction. The landing caused an extension of operations – and here we are, with the country upon our hands. At the time of trouble we begged and implored the French or any one else to come and help us to set the thing to rights, but they all deserted us when there was work to be done, though they are ready enough to scold and to impede us now. When we tried to get out of it, up came this wild Dervish movement, and we had to sit tighter than ever. We never wanted the task; but, now that it has come, we must put it through in a workmanlike manner. We've brought justice into the country, and purity of administration, and protection for the poor man. It has made more advance in the last twelve years than since the Moslem invasion in the seventh century. Except the pay of a couple of hundred men, who spend their money in the country, England has neither directly nor indirectly made a shilling out of it, and I don't believe you will find in history a more successful and more disinterested bit of work."

Headingly puffed thoughtfully at his cigarette.

"There is a house near ours, down on the Back Bay at Boston, which just ruins the whole prospect," said he. "It has old chairs littered about the stoop, and the shingles are loose, and the garden runs wild; but I don't know that the neighbours are exactly justified in rushing in, and stamping around, and running the

thing on their own lines."

"Not if it were on fire?" asked the Colonel.

Headingly laughed, and rose from his camp-stool.

"Well, it doesn't come within the provisions of the Monroe Doctrine, Colonel," said he. "I'm beginning to think, that modern Egypt is every bit as interesting as ancient, and that Rameses the Second wasn't the last live man in the country."

The two Englishmen rose and yawned.

"Yes, it's a whimsical freak of fortune which has sent men from a little island in the Atlantic to administer the land of the Pharaohs. We shall pass away and never leave a trace among the successive races who have held the country, for it is an Anglo-Saxon custom to write their deeds upon rocks. I dare say that the remains of a Cairo drainage system will be our most permanent record, unless they prove a thousand years hence that it was the work of the Hyksos kings," remarked Cecil Brown. "But here is the shore party come back."

Down below they could hear the mellow Irish accents of Mrs. Belmont and the deep voice of her husband, the iron-grey rifleshot. Mr. Stuart, the fat Birmingham clergyman, was thrashing out a question of piastres with a noisy donkey-boy, and the others were joining in with chaff and advice. Then the hubbub died away, the party from above came down the ladder, there were "good-nights," the shutting of doors, and the little steamer lay silent, dark, and motionless in the shadow of the high Haifa bank. And beyond this one point of civilisation and

of comfort there lay the limitless, savage, unchangeable desert, straw-coloured and dream-like in the moonlight, mottled over with the black shadows of the hills.

CHAPTER III

"Stoppa! Backa!" cried the native pilot to the European engineer

The bluff bows of the stern-wheeler had squelched into the soft brown mud, and the current had swept the boat alongside the bank. The long gangway was thrown across, and the six tall soldiers of the Soudanese escort filed along it, their light-blue, gold-trimmed zouave uniforms and their jaunty yellow and red forage caps showing up bravely in the clear morning light.

Above them, on the top of the bank, was ranged the line of donkeys, and the air was full of the clamour of the boys. In shrill, strident voices each was crying out the virtues of his own beast, and abusing that of his neighbour.

Colonel Cochrane and Mr. Belmont stood together in the bows, each wearing the broad white puggareed hat of the tourist. Miss Adams and her niece leaned against the rail beside them.

"Sorry your wife isn't coming, Belmont," said the Colonel.

"I think she had a touch of the sun yesterday. Her head aches very badly."

His voice was strong and thick like his figure.

"I should stay to keep her company, Mr. Belmont," said the

little American old maid; “but I learn that Mrs. Shlesinger finds the ride too long for her, and has some letters which she must mail to-day, so Mrs. Belmont will not be lonesome.”

“You’re very good, Miss Adams. We shall be back, you know, by two o’clock.”

“Is that certain?”

“It must be certain, for we are taking no lunch with us, and we shall be famished by then.”

“Yes, I expect we shall be ready for a hock and seltzer, at any rate,” said the Colonel. “This desert dust gives a flavour to the worst wine.”

“Now, ladies and gentlemen!” cried Mansoor, the dragoman, moving forward with something of the priest in his flowing garments and smooth, clean-shaven face. “We must start early that we may return before the meridial heat of the weather.” He ran his dark eyes over the little group of his tourists with a paternal expression. “You take your green glasses, Miss Adams, for glare very great out in the desert. Ah, Mr. Stuart, I set aside very fine donkey for you, – prize donkey, sir, always put aside for the gentleman of most weight. Never mind to take your monument ticket to-day. Now, ladies and gentlemen, if *you* please!”

Like a grotesque frieze the party moved one by one along the plank gangway and up the brown crumbling bank. Mr. Stephens led them, a thin, dry, serious figure, in an English straw hat. His red “Baedeker” gleamed under his arm, and in one hand he

held a little paper of notes, as if it were a brief. He took Miss Sadie by one arm and her aunt by the other as they toiled up the bank, and the young girl's laughter rang frank and clear in the morning air as "Baedeker" came fluttering down at their feet. Mr. Belmont and Colonel Cochrane followed, the brims of their sun-hats touching as they discussed the relative advantages of the Mauser, the Lebel, and the Lee-Metford. Behind them walked Cecil Brown, listless, cynical, self-contained. The fat clergyman puffed slowly up the bank, with many gasping witticisms at his own defects. "I'm one of those men who carry everything before them," said he, glancing ruefully at his rotundity, and chuckling wheezily at his own little joke. Last of all came Headingly, slight and tall, with the student stoop about his shoulders, and Fardet, the good-natured, fussy, argumentative Parisian.

"You see we have an escort to-day," he whispered to his companion.

"So I observed."

"Pah!" cried the Frenchman, throwing out his arms in derision; "as well have an escort from Paris to Versailles. This is all part of the play, Monsieur Headingly. It deceives no one, but it is part of the play.

Pourquoi ces drôles de militaires, dragoman, hein?"

It was the dragoman's *rôle* to be all things to all men, so he looked cautiously round before he answered to make sure that the English were mounted and out of earshot.

"*C'est ridicule, monsieur!*" said he, shrugging his fat shoulders.

"*Mais que voulez-vous? C'est l'ordre officiel Egyptien.*"

"*Egyptien! Pah, Anglais, Anglais – toujours Anglais!*" cried the angry Frenchman.

The frieze now was more grotesque than ever, but had changed suddenly to an equestrian one, sharply outlined against the deep-blue Egyptian sky. Those who have never ridden before have to ride in Egypt, and when the donkeys break into a canter, and the Nile Irregulars are at full charge, such a scene of flying veils, clutching hands, huddled swaying figures, and anxious faces is nowhere to be seen. Belmont, his square figure balanced upon a small white donkey, was waving his hat to his wife, who had come out upon the saloon-deck of the *Korosko*. Cochrane sat very erect with a stiff military seat, hands low, head high, and heels down, while beside him rode the young Oxford man, looking about him with drooping eyelids as if he thought the desert hardly respectable, and had his doubts about the Universe. Behind them the whole party was strung along the bank in varying stages of jolting and discomfort, a brown-faced, noisy donkey-boy running after each donkey. Looking back, they could see the little lead-coloured stern-wheeler, with the gleam of Mrs. Belmont's handkerchief from the deck. Beyond ran the broad, brown river, winding down in long curves to where, five miles off, the square, white block-houses upon the black, ragged hills marked the outskirts of Wady Haifa, which had been their starting-point that morning.

"Isn't it just too lovely for anything?" cried Sadie, joyously.

"I've got a donkey that runs on casters, and the saddle is just elegant. Did you ever see anything so cunning as these beads and things round his neck? You must make a memo, *re* donkey, Mr. Stephens. Isn't that correct legal English?"

Stephens looked at the pretty, animated, boyish face looking up at him from under the coquettish straw hat, and he wished that he had the courage to tell her in her own language that she was just too sweet for anything. But he feared above all things lest he should offend her, and so put an end to their present pleasant intimacy. So his compliment dwindled into a smile.

"You look very happy," said he.

"Well, who could help feeling good with this dry, clear air, and the blue sky and the crisp, yellow sand, and a superb donkey to carry you. I've just got everything in the world to make me happy."

"Everything?"

"Well, everything that I have any use for just now."

"I suppose you never know what it is to be sad?"

"Oh, when I *am* miserable I am just too miserable for words. I've sat and cried for days and days at Smith's College, and the other girls were just crazy to know what I was crying about, and guessing what the reason was that I wouldn't tell, when all the time the real true reason was that I didn't know myself. You know how it comes like a great dark shadow over you, and you don't know why or wherefore, but you've just got to settle down to it and be miserable."

"But you never had any real cause?"

"No, Mr. Stephens, I've had such a good time all my life, that I don't think, when I look back, that I ever had any real cause for sorrow."

"Well, Miss Sadie, I hope with all my heart that you will be able to say the same when you are the same age as your Aunt. Surely I hear her calling!"

"I wish, Mr. Stephens, you would strike my donkey-boy with your whip if he hits the donkey again," cried Miss Adams, jogging up on a high, raw-Boned beast. "Hi, dragoman, Mansoor, you tell this boy that I won't have the animals ill used, and that he ought to be ashamed of himself. Yes, you little rascal, you ought! He's grinning at me like an advertisement for a tooth paste. Do you think, Mr. Stephens, that if I were to knit that black soldier a pair of woollen stockings he would be allowed to wear them? The poor creature has bandages round his legs."

"Those are his putties, Miss Adams," said Colonel Cochrane, looking back at her. "We have found in India that they are the best support to the leg in marching. They are very much better than any stocking."

"Well, you don't say! They remind me mostly of a sick horse. But it's elegant to have the soldiers with us, though Monsieur Fardet tells me there's nothing for us to be scared about."

"That is only my opinion, Miss Adams," said the Frenchman, hastily. "It may be that Colonel Cochrane thinks otherwise."

"It is Monsieur Fardet's opinion against that of the officers

who have the responsibility of caring for the safety of the frontier," said the Colonel, coldly. "At least we will all agree that they have the effect of making the scene very much more picturesque."

The desert upon their right lay in long curves of sand, like the dunes which might have fringed some forgotten primeval sea. Topping them they could see the black, craggy summits of the curious volcanic hills which rise upon the Libyan side. On the crest of the low sand-hills they would catch a glimpse every now and then of a tall, sky-blue soldier, walking swiftly, his rifle at the trail. For a moment the lank, warlike figure would be sharply silhouetted against the sky. Then he would dip into a hollow and disappear, while some hundred yards off another would show for an instant and vanish.

"Wherever are they raised?" asked Sadie, watching the moving figures. "They look to me just about the same tint as the hotel boys in the States."

"I thought some question might arise about them," said Mr. Stephens, who was never so happy as when he could anticipate some wish of the pretty American. "I made one or two references this morning in the ship's library. Here it is —*re*– that's to say, about black soldiers. I have it on my notes that they are from the 10th Soudanese battalion of the Egyptian army. They are recruited from the Dinkas and the Shilluks – two negroid tribes living to the south of the Dervish country, near the Equator."

"How can the recruits come through the Dervishes, then?"

asked Headingly, sharply.

"I dare say there is no such very great difficulty over that," said Monsieur Fardet, with a wink at the American.

"The older men are the remains of the old black battalions. Some of them served with Gordon at Khartoum and have his medal to show. The others are many of them deserters from the Mahdi's army," said the Colonel.

"Well, so long as they are not wanted, they look right elegant in those blue jackets," Miss Adams observed. "But if there was any trouble, I guess we would wish they were less ornamental and a bit whiter."

"I am not so sure of that, Miss Adams," said the Colonel. "I have seen these fellows in the field, and I assure you that I have the utmost confidence in their steadiness."

"Well, I'll take your word without trying," said Miss Adams, with a decision which made every one smile.

So far their road had lain along the side of the river, which was swirling down upon their left hand deep and strong from the cataracts above. Here and there the rush of the current was broken by a black shining boulder over which the foam was spouting. Higher up they could see the white gleam of the rapids, and the banks grew into rugged cliffs, which were capped by a peculiar, outstanding, semicircular rock. It did not require the dragoman's aid to tell the party that this was the famous landmark to which they were bound. A long, level stretch lay before them, and the donkeys took it at a canter. At the farther side were

scattered rocks, black upon orange; and in the midst of them rose some broken shafts of pillars and a length of engraved wall, looking in its greyness and its solidity more like some work of Nature than of man. The fat, sleek dragoman had dismounted, and stood waiting in his petticoats and his cover-coat for the stragglers to gather round him.

"This temple, ladies and gentlemen," he cried, with the air of an auctioneer who is about to sell it to the highest bidder, "very fine example from the eighteenth dynasty. Here is the cartouche of Thotmes the Third," he pointed up with his donkey-whip at the rude, but deep, hieroglyphics upon the wall above him. "He live sixteen hundred years before Christ, and this is made to remember his victorious exhibition into Mesopotamia. Here we have his history from the time that he was with his mother, until he return with captives tied to his chariot. In this you see him crowned with Lower Egypt, and with Upper Egypt offering up sacrifice in honour of his victory to the God Ammon-ra. Here he bring his captives before him, and he cut off each his right hand. In this corner you see little pile – all right hands."

"My sakes, I shouldn't have liked to be here in those days," said Miss Adams.

"Why, there's nothing altered," remarked Cecil Brown. "The East is still the East. I've no doubt that within a hundred miles, or perhaps a good deal less, from where you stand – "

"Shut up!" whispered the Colonel, and the party shuffled on down the line of the wall with their faces up and their big hats

thrown backwards. The sun behind them struck the old grey masonry with a brassy glare, and carried on to it the strange black shadows of the tourists, mixing them up with the grim, high-nosed, square-shouldered warriors, and the grotesque, rigid deities who lined it. The broad shadow of the Reverend John Stuart, of Birmingham, smudged out both the heathen King and the god whom he worshipped.

"What's this?" he was asking in his wheezy voice, pointing up with a yellow Assouan cane.

"That is a hippopotamus," said the dragoman; and the tourists all tittered, for there was just a suspicion of Mr. Stuart himself in the carving.

"But it isn't bigger than a little pig," he protested. "You see that the King is putting his spear through it with ease."

"They make it small to show that it was a very small thing to the King," said the dragoman. "So you see that all the King's prisoners do not exceed his knee – which is not because he was so much taller, but so much more powerful. You see that he is bigger than his horse, because he is a king and the other is only a horse. The same way, these small women whom you see here and there are just his trivial little wives."

"Well, now!" cried Miss Adams, indignantly. "If they had sculped that King's soul it would have needed a lens to see it. Fancy his allowing his wives to be put in like that."

"If he did it now, Miss Adams," said the Frenchman, "he would have more fighting than ever in Mesopotamia. But time

brings revenge. Perhaps the day will soon come when we have the picture of the big, strong wife and the trivial little husband —*hein?*"

Cecil Brown and Headingly had dropped behind, for the glib comments of the dragoman, and the empty, light-hearted chatter of the tourists jarred upon their sense of solemnity. They stood in silence watching the grotesque procession, with its sun-hats and green veils, as it passed in the vivid sunshine down the front of the old grey wall. Above them two crested hoopoes were fluttering and calling amid the ruins of the pylon.

"Isn't it a sacrilege?" said the Oxford man, at last.

"Well, now, I'm glad you feel that about it, because it's how it always strikes me," Headingly answered, with feeling. "I'm not quite clear in my own mind how these things should be approached, – if they are to be approached at all, – but I am sure this is not the way. On the whole, I prefer the ruins that I have not seen to those which I have."

The young diplomatist looked up with his peculiarly bright smile, which faded away too soon into his languid, *blasé* mask.

"I've got a map," said the American, "and sometimes far away from anything in the very midst of the waterless, trackless desert, I see 'ruins' marked upon it – or 'remains of a temple,' perhaps. For example, the temple of Jupiter Ammon, which was one of the most considerable shrines in the world, was hundreds of miles from anywhere. Those are the ruins, solitary, unseen, unchanging through the centuries, which appeal to one's imagination. But

when I present a check at the door, and go in as if it were Barnum's show, all the subtle feeling of romance goes right out of it."

"Absolutely!" said Cecil Brown, looking over the desert with his dark, intolerant eyes. "If one could come wandering here alone – stumble upon it by chance, as it were – and find one's self in absolute solitude in the dim light of the temple, with these grotesque figures all around, it would be perfectly overwhelming. A man would be prostrated with wonder and awe. But when Belmont is puffing his bulldog pipe, and Stuart is wheezing, and Miss Sadie Adams is laughing – "

"And that jay of a dragoman speaking his piece," said Headingly; "I want to stand and think all the time, and I never seem to get the chance. I was ripe for manslaughter when I stood before the Great Pyramid, and couldn't get a quiet moment because they would boost me on to the top. I took a kick at one man which would have sent *him* to the top in one jump if I had hit meat. But fancy travelling all the way from America to see the pyramid, and then finding nothing better to do than to kick an Arab in front of it!"

The Oxford man laughed in his gentle, tired fashion.

"They are starting again," said he, and the two hastened forwards to take their places at the tail of the absurd procession.

Their route ran now among large, scattered boulders, and between stony, shingly hills. A narrow, winding path curved in and out amongst the rocks. Behind them their view was cut off

by similar hills, black and fantastic, like the slag-heaps at the shaft of a mine. A silence fell upon the little company, and even Sadie's bright face reflected the harshness of Nature. The escort had closed in, and marched beside them, their boots scrunching among the loose black rubble. Colonel Cochrane and Belmont were still riding together in the van.

"Do you know, Belmont," said the Colonel, in a low voice, "you may think me a fool, but I don't like this one little bit."

Belmont gave a short gruff laugh.

"It seemed all right in the saloon of the *Korosko*, but now that we are here we *do* seem rather up in the air," said he. "Still, you know, a party comes here every week, and nothing has ever yet gone wrong."

"I don't mind taking my chances when I am on the war-path," the Colonel answered. "That's all straightforward and in the way of business. But when you have women with you, and a helpless crowd like this, it becomes really dreadful. Of course, the chances are a hundred to one that we have no trouble; but if we should have – well, it won't bear thinking about. The wonderful thing is their complete unconsciousness that there is any danger whatever."

"Well, I like the English tailor-made dresses well enough for walking, Mr. Stephens," said Miss Sadie from behind them. "But for an afternoon dress, I think the French have more style than the English. Your milliners have a more severe cut, and they don't do the cunning little ribbons and bows and things in the same

way."

The Colonel smiled at Belmont.

"*She* is quite serene in her mind, at any rate," said he. "Of course, I wouldn't say what I think to any one but you, and I dare say it will all prove to be quite unfounded."

"Well, I could imagine parties of Dervishes on the prowl," said Belmont. "But what I cannot imagine is that they should just happen to come to the pulpit rock on the very morning when we are due there."

"Considering that our movements have been freely advertised, and that every one knows a week beforehand what our programme is, and where we are to be found, it does not strike me as being such a wonderful coincidence."

"It is a very remote chance," said Belmont, stoutly, but he was glad in his heart that his wife was safe and snug on board the steamer.

And now they were clear of the rocks again, with a fine stretch of firm yellow sand extending to the very base of the conical hill which lay before them. "Ay-ah! Ayah!" cried the boys, and whack came their sticks upon the flanks of the donkeys, which broke into a gallop, and away they all streamed over the plain. It was not until they had come to the end of the path which curves up the hill that the dragoman called a halt.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen, we are arrived for the so famous pulpit rock of Abousir. From the summit you will presently enjoy a panorama of remarkable fertility. But first you will observe that

over the rocky side of the hill are everywhere cut the names of great men who have passed it in their travels, and some of these names are older than the time of Christ."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.