

CHAPTER V

AN EVENING IN THE DESERT

FATHER GREGORY put out the candles which were burning on the altar in the little chapel, where he and some of his friends had just read together the evening office; and coming out into the white-walled garden, he stood for awhile in the semi-darkness, fingering the roses and breathing in their fragrance.

He was very proud of this little plantation; for the ground hereabouts, though capable of nourishing the group of hardy date palms, was scarcely to be distinguished from the barren desert around, where no shrub or blade of grass could exist. When he had first built his settlement he had marked out the prospective flower beds in orderly squares, and had dug away the gravel and lifeless soil from each to a depth of some two or three feet. He had then filled up these excavations with rich earth brought up from the Nile bank by a string of camels; and into each bed a little brick gutter had been directed, leading from the well in the outer courtyard. An hour's work each evening sufficed to irrigate the whole garden; and it was a rule of the establishment that all should lend a hand in turn at the rope and bucket. Now, as he stood musing in the peaceful quiet of early night, he could hear the water gurgling along the ducts, and could see beyond the archway the dim form of the man who happened to be taking his turn at the well—a black-bearded,