

Where the Desert Meets the Nile

skin was not darker than the tanned cuticle of the Englishman, but the brown was softer, and resembled coffee that has been plentifully diluted with cream. A handsome fellow in his way, with an expression rather unconcerned than dignified, which masked a countenance calculated to baffle even a shrewder and more experienced observer than Winston Bey.

Said the Englishman, looking at him closely:

"You are a Copt."

Inadvertently he had spoken in his mother tongue and the man laughed.

"If you follow the common prejudice and consider every Copt a Christian," he returned in purest English, "then I am no Copt; but if you mean that I am an Egyptian, and no dog of an Arab, then, indeed, you are correct in your estimate."

Winston uttered an involuntary exclamation of surprise. For a native to speak English is not so unusual; but none that he knew expressed himself with the same ease and confidence indicated in this man's reply. He brushed away some of the superheated sand and sat down facing his new acquaintance.

"Perhaps," said he—a touch of sarcasm in his voice—"I am speaking with a descendant of the Great Rameses himself."

"Better than that," rejoined the other, coolly. "My forefather was Ahtka-Rā, of true royal blood, who ruled the second Rameses as cleverly as that foolish monarch imagined he ruled the Egyptians."