

The combination of agonized despair and silent, diabolical laughter was in some peculiar way revolting. Robin lay back in the berth and literally shuddered.

It was not till after breakfast that their destination came into view. The Egyptian coast is so low-lying that the first sight of land was the cluster of the houses of Port Said, which seemed to be rising straight from the placid, blue Mediterranean, backed by nothing but the sky. At a distance the place looked like an island of dream, floating by magic upon an enchanted ocean.

Soon they had taken the pilot aboard and were steaming slowly towards their mooring-place, the long breakwater close on their right, with its great statue of the engineer De Lesseps towering up against the intense blue sky.

A few minutes later they had dropped anchor a hundred yards from the shore, and were watching the host of rowing-boats and launches that were hastening towards them. The first thing the traveller notices on arriving in Egypt is the noise. The native boatmen shout at one another, the native passengers shout at the boatmen, the native policemen shout at the passengers, the native officials shout at the policemen; and over above the din the commissionaires of the hotels and the agents of Messrs. Thomas Cook & Son shout as it were to unheeding heaven the names of their employers.

"Goodness me, what a noise!" exclaimed Mrs. Jones, who was standing by Robin's side on the deck as they stared down on the throng. "They all look furiously angry with each other."

"So this is Egypt," said Augustus Blake, "the Land of Mystery! Such is the scene on which the dark eyes of Cleopatra gazed!" And, with a kind of dramatic gloom, he whispered to himself: "The Siren of the East, the Serpent of old Nile!"

"Oh no," said Robin, in his most practical manner.