

AN EGYPTIAN INCIDENT.

"I'M going to put an end to this Egyptian plague," growled Colonel MacPherson. "We come here every winter, sail up the same old river, look at the same old pyramids—no modern additions or improvements—see the same abominable old images that have worn the same grotesque aspect for fifty centuries, and broil on the same uncomfortable deck, and all because that boy of mine wants to become known as an Egyptologist. To the deuce with beetles and sacred cattle. I'm tired of it all."

Out of breath with the exertion necessary to this long sentence, Colonel Tavish MacPherson leans back in his comfortable arm-chair and closes his eyes for a nap. The cause of his trouble is not very apparent, and as he sits there under the awning, with his half pay running on at the Horse Guards, with the rents of his deer forests and sheep farms in the Highlands faithfully collected and accounted for by the factor, and with his membership fees paid up to date at the Carlton and United Service Clubs, one would imagine that Egypt would appear something other than a house of bondage. The colonel's dahabeeh, with her big three-cornered sail trimmed to the breeze that ruffles the waters of the Nile and bears her onward to Assouan and the Great Cataract, is as quiet and restful albeit picturesque an object as one would care to see, as, on this December evening of 1870 she creeps up the river, the look-out man on the bow watching that the channel is followed, and the steersman, impassive as a mummy, leaning upon the long handle of the tiller.

Forward on the deck, face down or curled up in all sorts of odd positions, lie the crew, a motley collection of Arabs, Nubians and Osmanlis. There is nothing stirring. The mark of the desert is on all around. Even the sun, now nearly on a level with the Nubian mountains away on the horizon, looks tired and dusty. The intense quiet bothers the colonel; so he yawns and growls once more. He is a widower with two children—the older a lad of eighteen, who has already made something of a reputation as a student of Egyptian remains, having been enamoured of the land since the evil day when the colonel first proposed to winter on the Nile. The second is a gentle lad of ten years, well liked by everybody. He gives his vote for Egypt every winter, because Jack asks it as a favor. They are ashore now after relics, and have promised to report when the dahabeeh ties up for the night at Assouan before warping her way through the cataract.

The colonel's eyes follow a movement in the tangled group of figures on the deck. Two men rise, shouting at each other the while. The colonel

and the dragoman, who has just poked his head out of his room on the deck, look on lazily. Suddenly one of the disputants makes a rush at the other—the gleam of steel is seen, and the crew close round the men. A quick stroke, a shout, anger changed to agony, and a Nubian lies on the deck with the dagger of Aboo, a powerful Arab, in his breast.

All this so quickly that the colonel is still growling that there is nothing stirring to be seen in Egypt, when he reaches the group, and, stooping over the wounded man, draws the dagger out. It has left an ugly wound, but not dangerous, and as the wounded man is taken in charge by his comrades the colonel turns to the dragoman for an explanation.

With many profuse apologies the dragoman tells how the two men were sleeping side by side when the Nubian inadvertently put his foot against the Arab's face. That was all, and the dragoman smiled and bowed.

The colonel, an old disciplinarian, looked black as night. In effective English he ordered the dragoman, after he had discovered that the matter was not reckoned important enough for Egyptian law to recognise, to anchor the dahabeeh and send a boat ashore with the culprit and his baggage. To the dragoman's question as to how Aboo was to get back to Cairo, the colonel thundered that he might walk. The dragoman bowed and smiled—it was a habit he had learned from a French friend at Cairo—and translated the colonel's remark to Aboo, adding to them such little pleasantries as he thought of. He could walk. His shoes—this with a smile and a bow directed to Aboo's bare feet—his shoes might wear out, but —. So Aboo, having obtained his dagger and an old ring—his only article of baggage—goes ashore muttering revenge, which the dragoman interprets to the colonel with a smile and a bow. The dahabeeh glides on, and in an hour is moored at Assouan. The wandering relic hunters return and all aboard retire, for is not the cataract to be traversed at sundown to morrow?

Before sunrise Colonel MacPherson was awakened by the shout of the young gentleman's body servant, who cried excitedly: "Wake, master! We can't find Master Bob. Here is a bit of paper that lay on his bed."

While the colonel rubbed his eyes and looked at the scrap of Arabic the man produced, a commotion occurred outside, and the dragoman rushed in with Aboo's dagger in his hand. It had been taken from the breast of the Nubian, stabbed to the heart during the night. The boat that had been towed astern of the dahabeeh after Aboo's trip ashore was gone. There was no doubt, explained the dragoman with his customary smile, that the Arab had lain

ashore until the lights went out, swam aboard, knifed his enemy, and left again in the boat. At this the colonel, still holding the paper in his hand, turns pale and tremblingly gives it to Jack, who knows Arabic. Dragoman and crew crowd around while he slowly reads: "Aboo might have killed the English dog to-night, but to steal the pride of his tent was a better revenge."

They searched for the fugitives with shrinking hearts after a time, but never a trace of the boy, dead or living, did they find. Almost maddened with grief, but not until the hot weather threatened his life, Colonel MacPherson returned to Cairo and laid the terrible affair personally before the Khedive. But it was all in vain. Year after year he haunted the Nile, promising backsheesh to an unlimited extent for the restoration of his boy, but the Arabs shook their heads. Aboo had disappeared without leaving any trace. To the father who searched for his lost boy there was no lack of interest now in Egypt.

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"Forward by the right; march!"

Clear and loud comes the command, and the ugly, ill-conditioned steels of the camel corps moved forward with ungainly step. The wells of Aboo Klea are within sight, and Sir Herbert Stewart, who marched nine days ago with 1500 picked men across the desert to reach Nile and thence to press on to Khartoum, feels that his mission will be successful and that Gordon will be speedily relieved.

So does Captain Jack McPherson of the Egyptian army, attached for the present to the camelry, as he sails along on one of the ships of the desert.

This is an unseaworthy ship, and, as it tosses more than usual, he ejaculates: "Ugh, you brute, if there is an Arab at the wells, I will trade camels." With this, he looks forward to the rocky defile by which the route lies and sees fluttering above a ledge an Arab banner. For an instant he looks at it through his field glass and then rides in haste back along the ranks. A word in Sir Herbert's ear. The troops are halted and a zareba is in process of formation, when with beating of war drums and discordant yells that remain unanswered—for the throats of the men are too parched and thirsty to hurrah—a great body of Arabs start from the underwood around the entrance to the defile and, headed by many standard bearers, rushes in upon the British square.

Of the fight for life in that square, and the determination with which the Arabs fought to break the ranks, there is no need to tell. How Burnaby went down, fighting gloriously, and many another brave man beside him, history records.

With the utmost coolness, for he had been through many such scenes, Captain MacPherson, after the first rush,