

The Last Egyptian

The Englishman silently watched until the other had taken his third whiff; then, the ceremonial being completed, he spoke, choosing his words carefully.

"Seek as we may, my brother, for the records of the dead civilization of your native land, we know full well that the most important documents will be discovered in the future, as in the past, by the modern Egyptians themselves. Your traditions, handed down through many generations, give to you a secret knowledge of where the important papyri and tablets are deposited. If there are hidden tombs in Gebel Abu Fedah, or near the city of Al-Kusiyeh, perhaps you know where to find them; and if so, we will open them together and profit equally by what we secure."

The Egyptian shook his head and flicked the ash from his cigarette with an annoyed gesture.

"You are wrong in estimating the source of my knowledge," said he, in a tone that was slightly acrimonious. "Look at my rags," spreading his arms outward; "would I refuse your bribe if I knew how to earn it? I have not smoked a cigarette before in months—not since Tadros the dragoman came to Al Fedah in the winter. I am barefoot, because I fear to wear out my sandals until I know how to replace them. Often I am hungry, and I live like a jackal, shrinking from all intercourse with my fellows or with the world. That is Kāra, the son of kings, the royal one!"

Winston was astonished. It is seldom a native complains of his lot or resents his condition, however