

CHAPTER III

EASTWARD BOUND

IN the second half of the month of December, a few days after the events just recorded, Captain Robin Beechcroft, the young but already well-known explorer, turned his back on England and embarked on the special mission in Egypt which had been entrusted to him. He passed through Paris in a scurry of sleet and snow: he awoke next morning in Southern France, with the hot sun streaming into the stuffy little *wagon-lit* compartment. The sensation was amazing to him. It was like going out into the garden after a long illness. The country through which he was passing presented itself to his famished eye as a chiaroscuro of rich contrasts in colour, like a dish of fruit or a piece of Persian embroidery. The red roofs of the houses, their white walls, the green trees, the blue distance, the rich brown rocks, fell into place in an ever-changing kaleidoscope of colours and shapes.

He sprang out of his berth and sat for half an hour with his head out of the window, enjoying life as an Englishman so well can when he leaves his dear northern island behind him and turns his face to the South. His heart was full of the quality of adventure, and his mind was actively receptive and alert. He was stimulated by the eager enthusiasm of the natural traveller setting out upon his travels, of the wayfarer taking once more to the road and getting into his stride; and this fair morning he