wooden railway carriages unbearable; even in this short journey they were twice invited unctuously out to the little deserted station platform, of the rural English type, to accomplish a change of trains, the polite guard treating the matter each time as though it were a most unusual occurrence and one that distressed him deeply.

On arriving at Medina, two of the remarkable engines in locomotion, called an "enginders' trolley," awaited the party, and in the most matter-of-fact way possible, the railway station at Medina was left behind at a twenty-mile clip.

There is really, however, nothing matter of fact to a person accustomed to hansom cabs, in the progression of the "engineers' trolley" of Egypt. Adapted like a hand-car to go on the railway tracks, it consists of an elevated superstructure on which two passengers sit complacently with their backs to the engine; this takes the form of two satin-skinned young Arabs trained to a hair, who, clothed only in a loin-cloth (which they discarded at will) alternately propel the trolley at a high rate of speed. One man sprints for just a hundred paces along one of the shining rails, pushing the car ahead of him, while his teammate takes three breaths perched on a low rear seat, then a sound like the screech of an owl in the night is heard and the two figures change places with the quickness and precision of mechanism.

This form of trolley is expensive of human life, but inexpensive in other respects, as the runners generally die at about the age of twenty-five of consumption, while they earn some five shillings a week and an occasional cigarette.

Since the end of the Soudan campaign the work of irrigation has been scientifically extended from the Nile far into the interior, causing the sandy desert to produce five crops a year, and gradually forming centres of activity where before there was only aridity and emptiness. It was toward one of these locations that the acting commissioner was directing his journey.

After hours of weary progress through the heat of the afternoon, the approach of evening brought relief from the rays of the sun, and having passed through a straggling settlement of tents, the long, tiresome journey came to an end at last, as the trolleys slowed down and stopped not far from a solitary "rest house" which was their appointed destination.

Ruth and her brother alighted stiffly.

Alec flung a couple of cigarettes to the tireless runners, who, glistening with perspiration, sat with heaving sides, squatting in the dust, and preceded by the dragoman and Mahomed the cook, the travellers made their way to the "rest house."

A government "rest-house" is a one-story building made of a sort of adobe, surrounded by a covered veranda, in the middle of which, back and front, three or four steps lead into the main apartment. This serves as dining-room, and on each side of it is a large, gloomy bedroom.

These places, fitted out originally by an economical government, are used by one tired official after another, as a place where he can get a night's rest and a bath.

For years no cleansing hand is lifted to sweep or repair, so that the impersonal chill of a hotel is deepened into a still more dismal gloom by a general dilapidation due to years of neglect.

On entering the room assigned to her, it required a moment of self-control for Ruth to reconcile herself to spending the night in the dismal place, but being young and ravenously hungry, she was able to surmount such ladylike feelings of repugnance. She therefore unpacked in a business way and brushed her hair with a sense of comfort, while Mahomed fanned the charcoal embers of his stove, in preparation for a dinner soon to be created by his magic.

An Egyptian cook carries with him on a journey an outfit consisting of two baskets, one of which contains the stove and charcoal, together with a blanket in which he wraps himself at night, and possibly some potatoes; the second is filled with vegetables and meat, fruit, fish, flour and other things usually uncongenial to each other.

The stove is the stove of Africa, unchanged for centuries, long, flat and shallow, standing on six legs. The cook fills it with charcoal brands, and starting the fire with a spark from a flint, he crouches on his haunches near by, systematically encouraging the glowing embers with his palm-leaf fan, while savoury fumes arise, presaging the evolution of a dinner exotic and delicious.

Alec and his sister had been through several courses in much comfort and were toying with a snipe "en casserole," rich with aromas unknown to the "Cafe Ritz," when the front door was opened respectfully by the dragoman, who, making a low salaam, addressed himself to his master.

"It is a deplorable thing that his Excellency should be disturbed during the eating of the 'esha,' but an 'askari' is without, desiring to see his Excellency in the greatest haste, and, indeed, the matter which brings him at this time is most urgent."

With these words he moved aside, ushering in a corporal of the native police, who, standing stiffly "at attention," with his hand aloft in precise military salute, waited motionlessly for permission from his superior to speak.

The sight of this man, dressed in the blue, brass-buttoned uniform of a London "Bobby," varied by a sword, revolver and the universal "fez," made a rude break in the evening's tenor.

Alex, who had learned Arabic as a boy, entered at once into conversation with the newcomer, and the two talked volubly in guttural syllables. Ruth gathered, as she listened, that in the headquarters of the camp through which they had passed five miles back on the road that afternoon, the single telegraph operator lay stricken with enteric. Important messages had been coming in until the moment when the man's growing weakness had reached the point when he could receive no more. Knowing that Alec, with whom he had often talked over the wire, was at the "rest house," he had sent at once to enlist his help that night in the telegraph office, in order that the great organisation of the daily work might not be confused, and that none of the many hundred pickaxes need stay idle on the morrow.

"You heard the message, Ruth," said Alec. "I suppose I had better go; what do you think? Do you mind being left here alone for two or three hours? I'll simply find out what they have to say, tell them to send on a new man, and come straight back."

Ruth was not the kind of girl to complain. "It's awfully hard on you, you tired old boy," she said, "but it's got to be done, I suppose. You mustn't mind me. I shall go straight to bed, and I am so dreadfully tired that I am sure I shall be asleep before I know it."

"Well," rejoined Alec, as he unwillingly began to grope about for his "puggarri" and riding whip, "make yourself as comfortable as you can in that room of yours. I'm sorry it is such a dismal old cave."

The dragoman then came in, announcing that the pony was ready, the "askari" again saluted like a mechanical toy, and after a few more words the party filed out of the rest house and started on their weary five mile ride.

They remained in sight for quite a long time, as the brilliant moonlight of a cloudless night made the whole surrounding country distinguishable far into the distance.

The loud, even roar of the bullfrogs was overwhelming, and the only human sound Ruth heard as she turned to go indoors was the peaceful snoring of Mahomed the cook, lying face downward on the vegetable basket. She had not the heart to wake him; as she closed the door the sounds still reached her ear like a moaning.

The dragoman had helped the situation a little by covering the dilapidated bed with snow-white sheets and pillows.

The dreadfulness of the dark, which little children know so well, is a thing no one can really outgrow. What one of us is there who has not "looked for the dawn" through a dreary night?

Ruth's nerves were a little shaken by the long day's journey, and she had to take her courage in both hands while making her preparations for turning in. There was no place to put away her things but an old wardrobe which had been propped up against the wall by a wooden block placed under one corner. It had once been the natural maple wood, but had afterward been painted white. The parching sun of many days had blistered it all over and the white of years before was now grimy and discoloured.

Taking the candle in her hand she opened the creaking doors, and as they yielded, there was a whir, and a large bat shot out, extinguishing the light. She felt the touch of the creature's uncanny wings against her cheek as it flew