BOULGER DEMETRIUS CHARLES

THE LIFE OF GORDON, VOLUME II

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Содержание

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CHAPTER VIII. GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE SOUDAN

When General Gordon left Egypt for England in December 1876 it was with the expressed determination not to return; but the real state of his mind was not bitterness at any personal grievance, or even desire for rest, although he avowed his intention of taking six months' leave, so much as disinclination to leave half done a piece of work in which he had felt much interest, and with which he had identified himself. Another consideration presented itself to him, and several of his friends pressed the view on him with all the weight they possessed, that no signal success could be achieved unless he were placed in a position of supreme authority, not merely at the Equator, but throughout the vast province of the Soudan. Such was the decision Gordon himself, influenced no doubt by the views of two friends whose names need not be mentioned, but who were well known for their zeal in the anti-slavery cause, had come to a few weeks after his arrival in England; and not thinking that

there was any reasonable probability of the Khedive appointing him to any such post, he telegraphed to the British Consul-General, Mr Vivian, his determination not to return to Egypt. This communication was placed before the Khedive Ismail, who had a genuine admiration for Gordon, and who appreciated the value of his services. He at once took the matter into his own hands, and wrote the following letter, which shows that he thoroughly understood the arguments that would carry weight with the person to whom they were addressed: —

> "My Dear Gordon, – I was astonished yesterday to learn of the despatch you had sent to Mr Vivian, in which you inform me that you will not return; all the more so when I recall your interview at Abdin, during which you promised me to return, and complete the work we had commenced together. I must therefore attribute your telegram to the very natural feelings which influenced you on finding yourself at home and among your friends. But I cannot, my dear Gordon Pasha, think that a gentleman like Gordon can be found wanting with regard to his solemn promise, and thus, my dear Gordon, I await your return according to that promise. – Your affectionate
> *"Ismail."*

To such a letter as this a negative reply was difficult, if not impossible; and when General Gordon placed the matter in the hands of the Duke of Cambridge, as head of the army, he was told that he was bound to return. He accordingly telegraphed to the Khedive that he was willing to go back to the Soudan

if appointed Governor-General, and also that he would leave at once for Cairo to discuss the matter. On his arrival there, early in February 1877, the discussion of the terms and conditions on which Gordon would consent to return to the Upper Nile was resumed. He explained his views at length to the Minister, Cherif Pasha, who had succeeded Nubar as responsible adviser to the Khedive, concluding with the ultimatum: "Either give me the Soudan, or I will not go." The only compromise that Gordon would listen to was that the Khedive's eldest son should be sent as Viceroy to Khartoum, when he, for his part, would be willing to resume his old post at the Equator. The Egyptian Ministers and high officials were not in favour of any European being entrusted with such a high post, and they were especially averse to the delegation of powers to a Christian, which would leave him independent of everyone except the Khedive. But for the personal intervention of the Khedive, Gordon would not have revisited Cairo; and but for the same intervention he would never have been made Governor-General, as, after a week's negotiation with Cherif, an agreement was farther off than ever, and Gordon's patience was nearly exhausted. The Khedive, really solicitous for Gordon's help, and suspecting that there was something he did not know, asked Mr Vivian to explain the matter fully to him. On hearing the cause of the difficulty, Ismail at once said: "I will give Gordon the Soudan," and two days later he saw and told General Gordon the same thing, which found formal expression in the following letter, written on 17th

February 1877, the day before Gordon left for Massowah: —

"My Dear Gordon Pasha, – Appreciating your honourable character, your energy, and the great services that you have already rendered to my Government, I have decided to unite in one great Governor-Generalship the whole of the Soudan, Darfour, and the Equatorial Provinces, and to entrust to you the important mission of directing it. I am about to issue a Decree to this effect.

"The territories to be included in this Government being very vast, it is necessary for good administration that you should have under your orders three Vakils – one for the Soudan properly so called and the Provinces of the Equator, another for Darfour, and the third for the Red Sea coast and the Eastern Soudan.

"In the event of your deeming any changes necessary, you will make your observations to me.

"The Governor-Generalship of the Soudan is completely independent of the Ministry of Finance.

"I direct your attention to two points, viz. – the suppression of slavery, and the improvement of the means of communication.

"Abyssinia extends along a great part of the frontiers of the Soudan. I beg of you, when you are on the spot, to carefully examine into the situation of affairs, and I authorise you, if you deem it expedient, to enter into negotiations with the Abyssinian authorities with the view of arriving at a settlement of pending questions.

"I end by thanking you, my dear Gordon Pasha, for your kindness in continuing to Egypt your precious services,

and I am fully persuaded that, with the aid of your great experience and your devotion, we shall bring to a happy end the work we are pursuing together.

"Believe, my dear Gordon Pasha, in my sentiments of high esteem and sincere friendship. – Your affectionate *Ismail."*

Nothing could be more gracious than this letter, which made General Gordon independent of the men who he feared would thwart him, and responsible to the Khedive alone. It was followed up a few weeks later – that is to say, after the new Governor-General had left for his destination – by the conferring of the military rank of Muchir or Marshal. At the same time the Khedive sent him a handsome uniform, with £150 worth of gold lace on the coat, and the Grand Cordon of the Medjidieh Order, which, it may be worth noting here, General Gordon only wore when in Egyptian uniform. These acts on the part of the Khedive Ismail show that, whatever may have been his reasons for taking up the slavery question, he was really sincere in his desire to support Gordon, who fully realised and appreciated the good-will and friendly intentions of this Egyptian ruler. When an unfavourable judgment is passed on Ismail Pasha, his consistent support of General Gordon may be cited to show that neither his judgment nor his heart was as bad as his numerous detractors would have the world believe.

Having settled the character of the administration he was to conduct, General Gordon did not waste a day at Cairo. The

holiday and rest to which he was fully entitled, and of which there can be no doubt that he stood greatly in need, were reduced to the smallest limits. Only two months intervened between his departure from Cairo for London on coming down from the Equator, and his second departure from Cairo to the Soudan. Much of that period had been passed in travelling, much more in exhausting and uncongenial negotiation in the Egyptian capital. All the brief space over enabled him to do was to pass the Christmas with several members of his family, to which he was so deeply attached, to visit his sisters in the old home at Southampton, and to run down for a day to Gravesend, the scene of his philanthropic labours a few years before. Yet, with his extraordinary recuperative force, he hastened with fresh strength and spirit to take up a more arduous and more responsible task than that he had felt compelled to relinquish so short a period before. With almost boyish energy, tempered by a profound belief in the workings of the Divine will, he turned his face once more to that torrid region, where at that time and since scenes of cruelty and human suffering have been enacted rarely surpassed in the history of the world.

Having thus described the circumstances and conditions under which General Gordon consented to take up the Soudan question, it is desirable to explain clearly what were the objects he had in his own mind, and what was the practical task he set himself to accomplish. Fortunately, this description need not be based on surmise or individual conjecture. General Gordon set forth

his task in the plainest language, and he held the clearest, and, as the result showed, the most correct views as to what had to be done, and the difficulties that stood in the way of its accomplishment. He wrote on the very threshold of his undertaking these memorable sentences: —

> "I have to contend with many vested interests, with fanaticism, with the abolition of hundreds of Arnauts, Turks, etc., now acting as Bashi-Bazouks, with inefficient governors, with wild independent tribes of Bedouins, and with a large semi-independent province lately under Zebehr Pasha at Bahr Gazelle… With terrific exertion, in two or three years' time I may, with God's administration, make a good province, with a good army, and a fair revenue and peace, and an increased trade, and also have suppressed slave raids."

No one can dispute either the Titanic magnitude of the task to be accomplished or the benefit its accomplishment would confer on a miserably unhappy population. How completely the project was carried out by one man, where powerful Governments and large armies have failed both before and since, has now to be demonstrated.

General Gordon proceeded direct from Cairo to Massowah, which route he selected because he hoped to settle the Abyssinian dispute before he commenced operations in the Soudan. Both the Khedive and the British Government wished a termination to be put to the troubles that had for some time prevailed in the border

lands of Abyssinia and the Eastern Soudan, and it was hoped that Gordon's reputation and energy would facilitate the removal of all difficulties with King John, who, after the death of Theodore, had succeeded in obtaining the coveted title of "Negus."

In order to understand the position, a few historical facts must be recorded. By the year 1874 King John's authority was established over every province except in the south, Shoa, where Menelik retained his independence, and in the north, Bogos, which was seized in the year stated by Munzinger Bey, a Swiss holding the post of Governor of Massowah under the Khedive. In seizing Bogos, Munzinger had dispossessed its hereditary chief, Walad el Michael, who retired to Hamaçem, also part of his patrimony, where he raised forces in self-defence. Munzinger proposed to annex Hamaçem, and the Khedive assented; but he entrusted the command of the expedition to Arokol Bey, and a Danish officer named Arendrup as military adviser, and Munzinger was forced to be content with a minor command at Tajoura, where he was killed some months later. The Egyptian expedition meantime advanced with equal confidence and carelessness upon Hamaçem, Michael attacked it in several detachments, and had the double satisfaction of destroying the troops and capturing their arms and ammunition. Such was the disastrous commencement of those pending questions to which the Khedive Ismail referred in his letter to General Gordon.

The Khedive decided to retrieve this reverse, and to continue his original design. With this object a considerable number of

troops were sent to Massowah, and the conduct of the affair was entrusted to Ratib Pasha and an American soldier of fortune, Colonel Loring Pasha. By this time – 1876 – Michael had quarrelled with King John, who had compelled him to give up the weapons he had captured from the Egyptians, and, anxious for revenge, he threw in his lot with his recent adversaries. The Egyptian leaders showed they had not profited by the experience of their predecessors. They advanced in the same bold and incautious manner, and after they had built two strong forts on the Gura plateau they were induced, by jealousy of each other or contempt for their enemy when he appeared, to leave the shelter of their forts, and to fight in the open. The Egyptian Ratib had the good sense to advise, "Stay in the forts," but Loring exclaimed: "No! march out of them. You are afraid!" and thus a taunt once again sufficed to banish prudence. The result of this action, which lasted only an hour, was the loss of over 10,000 Egyptian troops, of 25 cannon, and 10,000 Remington rifles. The survivors took refuge in the forts, and succeeded in holding them. Negotiations then followed, and King John showed an unexpected moderation and desire for peace with Egypt, but only on the condition of the surrender of his recalcitrant vassal Michael. Michael retaliated by carrying raids into King John's territory, thus keeping the whole border in a state of disorder, which precluded all idea of a stable peace.

Such was the position with which General Gordon had to deal. He had to encourage the weakened and disheartened Egyptian

garrison, to muzzle Michael without exposing the Khedive to the charge of deserting his ally, and to conclude a peace with Abyssinia without surrendering either Bogos or Michael. At this stage we are only called upon to describe the first brief phase of this delicate question, which at recurring intervals occupied Gordon's attention during the whole of his stay in the Soudan. His first step was to inform Michael that the subsidy of money and provisions would only be paid him on condition that he abstained from attacking the Abyssinian frontier; his next to write a letter to King John, offering him fair terms, and enclosing the draft of a treaty of amity. There was good reason to think that these overtures would have produced a favourable result if it had been possible for General Gordon to have seen King John at that time, but unfortunately a fresh war had just broken out with Menelik, and King John had to proceed in all haste to Shoa. He did not reply to Gordon's letter for six months, and by that time Gordon was too thoroughly engaged in the Soudan to take up the Abyssinian question until the force of events, as will be seen, again compelled him to do so.

Having decided that the Abyssinian dispute must wait, General Gordon proceeded by Kassala on his journey to Khartoum. Travelling not less than thirty miles a day, in great heat, organising the administration on his way, and granting personal audience to everyone who wished to see him, from the lowest miserable and naked peasant to the highest official or religious personage, like the Shereef Said Hakim, he reached

Khartoum on the 3rd May. He did not delay an hour in the commencement of his task. His first public announcement was to abolish the *courbash*, to remit arrears of taxation, and to sanction a scheme for pumping the river water into the town. The *Kadi* or mayor read this address in the public square; the people hailed it with manifestations of pleasure, and Gordon himself, carried away by his enthusiasm for his work, compresses the long harangue into a brief text: "With the help of God, I will hold the balance level."

But the measures named were not attended by any great difficulty in their inception or execution. They were merely the preliminaries to the serious and risky disbandment of the Bashi-Bazouks, and the steps necessary to restrict and control, not merely the trade in, but the possession of, slaves. As General Gordon repeatedly pointed out, his policy and proceedings were a direct attack on the only property that existed in the Soudan, and justice to the slave could not be equitably dispensed by injustice to the slave-owner. The third class of slave raider stood in a separate category, and in dealing with him Gordon never felt a trace of compunction. He had terminated the career of those ruthless scourges of the African races at the Equator, and with God's help he was determined to end it throughout the Soudan. But the slave question in Egypt was many-sided, and bristled with difficulties to anyone who understood it, and wished to mete out a fair and equable treatment to all concerned.

It was with the special object of maintaining the rights of

the owners as well as of the slaves that Gordon proposed a set of regulations, making the immediate registration of slaves compulsory, and thus paving the way for the promulgation of the Slave Convention already under negotiation. His propositions were only four in number, and read as follows: —

> 1. Enforce the law compelling runaway slaves to return to their masters, except when cruelly treated.
>
> 2. Require masters to register their slaves before 1st January 1878.
>
> 3. If the masters neglect to register them, then Regulation 1 not to be enforced in their favour.
>
> 4. No registration to be allowed after 1st January 1878.

By these simple but practical arrangements General Gordon would have upheld the rights of the slave-owners, and thus disarmed their hostility, at the same time that he stopped the imposition of servitude on any fresh persons. In the course of time, and without imposing on the Exchequer the burden of the compensation, which he saw the owners were in equity entitled to, he would thus have put an end to the slave trade throughout the Soudan.

The Anglo-Egyptian Convention on the subject of the slave trade, signed on 4th August 1877, was neither so simple nor so practical, while there was a glaring inconsistency between its provisions and the Khedivial Decree that accompanied it.

The second article of the Convention reads: "Any person engaged in traffic of slaves, either directly or indirectly, shall be

considered guilty of stealing with murder (*vol avec meurtre*)," and consequently punishable, as General Gordon assumed, with death.

But the first and second clauses of the Khedive's Decree were to a different effect. They ran as follows: —

> "The sale of slaves from family to family will be prohibited. This prohibition will take effect in seven years in Cairo, and in twelve years in the Soudan.
>
> "After the lapse of this term of years any infraction of this prohibition will be punished by an imprisonment of from five months to five years."

The literal interpretation of this decree would have left Gordon helpless to do anything for the curtailment of the slave trade until the year 1889, and then only permitted to inflict a quite insufficient punishment on those who broke the law. General Gordon pointed out the contradiction between the Convention and the Decree, and the impossibility of carrying out his original instructions if he were deprived of the power of allotting adequate punishment for offences; and he reverted to his original proposition of registration, for which the Slave Convention made no provision, although the negotiators at Cairo were fully aware of his views and recommendations expressed in an official despatch three months before that Convention was signed. To these representations Gordon never received any reply. He was left to work out the problem for himself, to carry on the suppression of the slave trade as best he could, and to take the

risk of official censure and repudiation for following one set of instructions in the Convention in preference to those recorded in the Decree. The outside public blamed the Khedive, and Gordon himself blamed Nubar Pasha and the Egyptian Ministry; but the real fault lay at the doors of the British Government, which knew of Gordon's representations and the discrepancy between the orders of the Khedive and the Convention they had signed together, and yet did nothing to enforce the precise fulfilment of the provisions it had thought it worth while to resort to diplomacy to obtain. The same hesitation and inability to grasp the real issues has characterised British policy in Egypt down to the present hour.

If Gordon had not been a man fearless of responsibility, and resolved that some result should ensue from his labours, he would no doubt have expended his patience and strength in futile efforts to obtain clearer and more consistent instructions from Cairo, and, harassed by official tergiversation and delay, he would have been driven to give up his task in disgust if not despair. But being what he was – a man of the greatest determination and the highest spirit – he abandoned any useless effort to negotiate with either the English or the Egyptian authorities in the Delta, and he turned to the work in hand with the resolve to govern the Soudan in the name of the Khedive, but as a practical Dictator. It was then that broke from him the characteristic and courageous phrase: "I will carry things with a high hand to the last."

The first and most pressing task to which Gordon had

to address himself was the supersession of the Turkish and Arab irregulars, who, under the name of "Bashi-Bazouks," constituted a large part of the provincial garrison. Not merely were they inefficient from a military point of view, but their practice, confirmed by long immunity, had been to prey on the unoffending population. They thus brought the Government into disrepute, at the same time that they were an element of weakness in its position. Gordon saw that if the Khedive had no better support than their services, his authority in the Soudan was liable at any moment to be overthrown. It had been the practice of the Cairo authorities to send up, whenever reinforcements were asked for, Arnaut and Arab loafers in that city, and these men were expected to pay themselves without troubling the Government. This they did to their own satisfaction, until Gordon resolved to put an end to their misdeeds at all cost, for he found that not merely did they pillage the people, but that they were active abettors of the slave trade. Yet as he possessed no military force, while there were not fewer than 6000 Bashi-Bazouks scattered throughout the provinces, he had to proceed with caution. His method of breaking up this body is a striking illustration of his thorough grasp of detail, and of the prudence, as well as daring, with which he applied what he conceived to be the most sensible means of removing a grave difficulty. This considerable force was scattered in numerous small garrisons throughout the province. From a military point of view this arrangement was bad, but it enabled each separate garrison to do

a little surreptitious slave-hunting on its own account. General Gordon called in these garrisons, confined the Bashi-Bazouks to three or four places, peremptorily stopped the arrival of recruits, and gradually replaced them with trustworthy black Soudanese soldiers. Before he laid down the reins of power, at the end of 1879, he had completely broken up this body, and as effectually relieved the Soudanese from their military tyrants as he had freed them from the whip.

Having put all these matters in trim, Gordon left Khartoum in the middle of the summer of 1877 for the western province of Darfour, where a number of matters claimed his pressing attention. In that province there were several large Egyptian garrisons confined in two or three towns, and unable – through fear, as it proved, but on account of formidable enemies, as was alleged – to move outside them. The reports of trouble and hostility were no doubt exaggerated, but still there was a simmering of disturbance below the surface that portended peril in the future; and read by the light of after events, it seems little short of miraculous that General Gordon was able to keep it under by his own personal energy and the magic of his name. When on the point of starting to relieve these garrisons, he found himself compelled to disband a regiment of 500 Bashi-Bazouks, who constituted the only force at his immediate disposal. He had then to organise a nondescript body, after the same fashion as he had adopted at the Equator, and with 500 followers of this kind – of whom he said only 150 were any good – he started on

his march for the districts which lie several hundred miles west of the White Nile, and approach most nearly of the Khedive's possessions to Lake Tchad.

The enemies with whom General Gordon had to deal were two. There was first Haroun, who claimed, as the principal survivor after Zebehr's invasion of Darfour, already described, to be the true Sultan of that State; and secondly, Suleiman, the son of Zebehr, and the nominal leader of the slave-dealers. While the former was in open revolt, the latter's covert hostility was the more to be dreaded, although Suleiman might naturally hesitate to throw off the mask lest his revolt might be the signal for his father's execution at Cairo – Zebehr having been detained there after his too confiding visit a few years before. It was therefore both prudent and necessary to ignore Suleiman until Haroun had been brought into subjection, or in some other way compelled to desist from acts of hostility.

General Gordon's plan was simple in the extreme. Leaving the Nile with 500 men, he determined to collect *en route* the efficient part of the scattered garrisons, sending those who were not efficient to the river for transport to Khartoum, and with this force to relieve the garrison at Fascher, the most distant of the large towns or stations in Darfour. It will be understood that these garrisons numbered several thousand men each, while Gordon's relieving body was only a few hundreds; but their *morale* had sunk so low that they dared not take the field against an enemy whom their own terror, and not the reality, painted as formidable.

Even before he began his advance, Gordon had taken a fair measure of the revolt, which he expressed himself confident of suppressing without firing a shot. At Dara, the place which in the Mahdist war was well defended by Slatin Pasha, he released 1800 troops; but he was kept in inactivity for some weeks owing to the necessity of organising his force and of ascertaining how far Suleiman, with his robber confederacy of 10,000 fighting men at Shaka – only 150 miles south-east of Dara – might be counted on to remain quiet. During this period of suspense he was compelled to take the field against a formidable tribe called by the name of the Leopard, which threatened his rear. It is unnecessary to enter upon the details of this expedition, which was completely successful, notwithstanding the cowardice of his troops, and which ended with the abject submission of the offending clan.

Having assembled a force of a kind of 3,500 men, he resolved to make a forced march to Fascher, and then with the same promptitude to descend on Shaka, and settle the pending dispute with Suleiman. These plans he kept locked in his own bosom, for his camp was full of spies, and his own surroundings were not to be trusted.

Leaving the main portion of his troops at Dara, he advanced on Fascher at the head of less than 1000 men, taking the lead himself with the small bodyguard he had organised of 150 picked Soudanese. With these he entered Fascher, where there were 3000 troops, and the Pasha, Hassan Helmi, had 10,000 more

at Kolkol, three days' journey away. Gordon found the garrison quite demoralised, and afraid to move outside the walls. He at once ordered Hassan Pasha to come to him, with the intention of punishing him by dismissal for his negligence and cowardice in commanding a force that, properly led, might have coerced the whole province, when the alarming news reached the Governor-General that Suleiman and his band had quitted Shaka, and were plundering in the neighbourhood of Dara itself. The gravity of this danger admitted of no delay. Not a moment could be spared to either punish an incapable lieutenant or to crush the foe Haroun, whose proceedings were the alleged main cause of trouble in Darfour. Gordon returned with his bodyguard as fast as possible, and, leaving even it behind, traversed the last eighty-five miles alone on his camel in a day and a half. Here may be introduced what he wrote himself on the subject of these rapid and often solitary camel journeys: —

> "I have a splendid camel – none like it; it flies along, and quite astonishes even the Arabs. I came flying into this station in Marshal's uniform, and before the men had had time to unpile their arms, I had arrived, with only one man with me. I could not help it; the escort did not come in for an hour and a half afterwards. The Arab chief who came with me said it was the telegraph. The Gordons and the camels are of the same race – let them take an idea into their heads, and nothing will take it out… It is fearful to see the Governor-General arrayed in gold clothes, flying along like a madman, with only a guide, as if he were pursued… If I

were fastidious, I should be as many weeks as I now am days on the road; I gain a great deal of prestige by these unheard-of marches. It makes the people fear me much more than if I were slow."

The situation was in every way as serious as was represented. The Dara garrison as a fighting force was valueless, and with the exception of his small bodyguard, still on the road from Fascher, Gordon had not a man on whom he could count. Suleiman and his whole force were encamped not three miles from the town. Gordon quite realised the position; he saw that his own life, and, what he valued more, the whole work on which he had been so long engaged, were at stake, and that a moment's hesitation would mean ruin. He rose to the crisis. At daybreak, attired in his official costume, with the Medjidieh gleaming on his breast, he mounted his horse and rode off to Suleiman's camp. Suleiman meditated treachery, and a trifle would have decided him to take the step of seizing Gordon, and holding him as hostage for his father. Had Gordon delayed even a few hours, there is no doubt that the slave-hunters would have executed their original design; but his extraordinary promptitude and self-confidence disconcerted them, and probably saved his own life. Gordon rode down the brigand lines; Suleiman, described as "a nice-looking lad of twenty-two," received him with marks of respect, and the Governor-General, without giving them a moment to think, at once summoned him and his chief lieutenants to an audience in the tent placed at his disposal. Here Gordon went straight to

the point, accusing them of meditated rebellion, and telling them that he meant to break up their confederacy. After listening to this indictment, they all made him submission very abjectly; but Gordon saw that Suleiman had not forgiven him, and when the truth came afterwards to be known, it was found that he did not carry out his project only because his principal lieutenants had deserted him. When the negotiations were over, Suleiman retired with 1500 men to Shaka, where we shall hear of him again, and Gordon took into his pay the other half of the brigand force. In this remarkable manner did he stave off the greatest peril which had yet threatened him in the Soudan.

The following corroborative account of this incident was furnished long afterwards by Slatin Pasha: —

> "In the midst of all this discussion and difference of opinion, Gordon, travelling by Keriut and Shieria, had halted at a spot about four hours' march from Dara; and having instructed his escort to follow him as usual, he and his two secretaries started in advance on camels. Hearing of his approach, Suleiman had given orders to his troops to deploy in three lines between the camp and the fort, and while this operation was being carried out, Gordon, coming from the rear of the troops, passed rapidly through the lines, riding at a smart trot, and, saluting the troops right and left, reached the fort. The suddenness of Gordon's arrival left the leaders no time to make their plans. They therefore ordered the general salute; but even before the thunder of the guns was heard, Gordon had already sent orders to Suleiman

and his chiefs to appear instantly before him… Thus had Gordon, by his amazing rapidity and quick grasp of the situation, arrived in two days at the settlement of a question which literally bristled with dangers and difficulties. Had Suleiman offered resistance at a time when Darfour was in a disturbed state, Gordon's position and the maintenance of Egyptian authority in these districts would have been precarious in the extreme."

What Gordon's own opinion of this affair was is revealed in the following extremely characteristic letter written to one of those anti-slavery enthusiasts, who seemed to think that the whole difficulty could be settled by a proclamation or two, and a rigid enforcement of a strict law sentencing every one connected with the slave trade without discrimination to death: —

"There are some 6000 more slave-dealers in the interior who will obey me now they have heard that Zebehr's son and the other chiefs have given in. You can imagine what a difficulty there is in dealing with all these armed men. I have separated them here and there, and in course of time will rid myself of the mass. Would you shoot them all? Have they no rights? Are they not to be considered? Had the planters no rights? Did not our Government once allow slave-trading? Do you know that cargoes of slaves came into Bristol Harbour in the time of our fathers? I would have given £500 to have had you and the Anti-Slavery Society in Dara during the three days of doubt whether the slave-dealers would fight or not. A bad fort, a coward garrison, and not one who did not tremble – on the other side a strong,

determined set of men accustomed to war, good shots, with two field-pieces. I would have liked to hear what you would all have said then. I do not say this in brag, for God knows what my anxiety was."

The drama, of which the first act took place in Suleiman's camp outside Dara, was not then ended. Gordon knew that to leave a thing half done was only to invite the danger to reappear. Suleiman had retired with his 1500 men to Shaka, the followers of Zebehr from all sides throughout the province would flock to his standard, and in a little time he would be more formidable and hostile than before. Four days after Suleiman left Dara, Gordon set out for the same place, at the head of four companies, and after a six days' march through terrible heat he reached Shaka. The slave-hunters had had no time to recover their spirits, they were all completely cowed and very submissive; and Suleiman craved favour at the hands of the man against whose life he had only a few days before been plotting. Unfortunately Gordon could not remain at Shaka, to attend in person to the dispersion of Suleiman's band, and after his departure that young leader regained his confidence, and resorted to his hostile and ambitious designs; but the success of General Gordon's plans in the summer of 1877 was complete, and sufficed to greatly diminish the gravity of the peril when, twelve months later, Suleiman broke out afresh, and fell by the hands of Gessi.

While General Gordon was facing these personal dangers, and coping with difficulties in a manner that has never been

surpassed, and that will stand as an example to all time of how the energy, courage, and attention to detail of an individual will compensate for bad troops and deficient resources, he was experiencing the bitter truth that no one can escape calumny. The arm-chair reformers of London were not at all pleased with his methods, and they were quite shocked when they heard that General Gordon, whom they affected to regard as the nominee of the Anti-Slavery Society, and not as the responsible lieutenant of a foreign potentate, was in the habit, not merely of restoring fugitive slaves to their lawful owners, but even of purchasing slaves with his own and the Government money, in order to convert them into soldiers. From their narrow point of view, it seemed to them that these steps were a direct encouragement of the slave-trade, and they denounced Gordon's action with an extraordinary, but none the less bitter, ignorance of the fact that he was employing the only practical means of carrying out the mission which, in addition to his administrative duties, had been practically imposed on him as the representative of civilization. These good but misinformed persons must have believed that the Egyptian garrison in the Soudan was efficient, that communications were easy, and the climate not unpleasant, and that Gordon, supported by zealous lieutenants, had only to hold up his hand or pass a resolution, in the fashion of Exeter Hall, for the chains, real and metaphysical, to fall from the limbs of the negro population of Inner Africa. That was their dream. The reality was a worthless and craven army, a climate that killed

most Europeans, and which the vigour and abstemiousness of Gordon scarcely enabled him to endure, communications only maintained and represented by the wearying flight of the camel across the desert, treachery and hostility to his plans, if not his person, among his colleagues – all these difficulties and dangers overcome and rendered nugatory by the earnestness and energy of one man alone. Well might his indignation find vent in such a grand outburst as this: —

> "I do not believe in you all. You say this and that, and you do not do it; you give your money, and you have done your duty; you praise one another, etc. I do not wonder at it. God has given you ties and anchors to this earth; you have wives and families. I, thank God, have none of them, and am free. Now understand me. If it suit me, I will buy slaves. I will let captured slaves go down to Egypt and not molest them, and I will do what I like, and what God, in His mercy, may direct me to do about domestic slaves; but I will break the neck of slave raids, even if it cost me my life. I will buy slaves for my army; for this purpose I will make soldiers against their will, to enable me to prevent raids. I will do this in the light of day, and defy your resolutions and your actions. Would my heart be broken if I was ousted from this command? Should I regret the eternal camel-riding, the heat, the misery I am forced to witness, the discomforts of everything around my domestic life? Look at my travels in seven months. Thousands of miles on camels, and no hope of rest for another year. You are only called on at intervals to rely on your God; with me I am obliged continually to do

so. Find me the man and I will take him as my help who utterly despises money, name, glory, honour; one who never wishes to see his home again; one who looks to God as the Source of good and Controller of evil; one who has a healthy body and energetic spirit, and one who looks on death as a release from misery; and if you cannot find him, then leave me alone. To carry myself is enough for me; I want no other baggage."

Gordon's troubles were not only with English visionaries. The Egyptian officials had always regarded the delegation of supreme powers to him with dislike, and this sentiment became unqualified apprehension when they saw how resolute he was in exercising them. Ismail Pasha was disposed to place unlimited trust in his energetic Governor-General, but he could not but be somewhat influenced by those around him while Gordon was far away. When, therefore, Gordon took into his own hands the power of life and death, and sentenced men to be hanged and shot, he roused that opposition to the highest point of activity, and received repeated remonstrances by telegraph from Cairo. To these he replied firmly, but quietly, that on no other condition could the administration be carried on, and that his authority as Viceroy would be undermined if he could not dispense prompt justice. Notwithstanding all his representations, he never obtained the ratification of his right to pass death sentences; but with that strong will that he showed in every crisis, he announced his determination to act on his own responsibility. On at least two occasions he expresses a feeling of gratification at having caused

murderers to be hung.

This is a suitable moment to lay stress on the true views Gordon held on the subject of bloodshed. While averse to all warfare by disposition, and without the smallest trace of what might be called the military spirit, General Gordon had none of that timid and unreasoning shrinking from taking life, which is often cruel and always cowardly. He punished the guilty without the least false compunction, even with a death sentence, and if necessity left no choice, he would have executed that sentence himself, provided he was quite convinced of its justice. As a rule, he went unarmed in the Soudan, as in China; but there were exceptions, and on at least one occasion he took an active and decisive part in a conflict. He was being attacked by one of the tribes, and his men were firing wildly and without result. Then Gordon snatched a rifle from one of his men, and firing at the hostile leader, killed him. There are at least two other incidents that will show him in a light that many of his admirers would keep suppressed, but that bring out his human nature. A clumsy servant fired off his heavy duck-gun close to his head, and Gordon very naturally gave him a smart box on the ears which the fellow would remember for a week. Excited by the misery of a slave-gang, he asked the boy in charge of them to whom they belonged, and as he hesitated, he struck him across the face with his whip. Gordon's comment on this act is that it was "cruel and cowardly, but he was enraged, and could not help it." One feels on reading this that one would have done so

oneself, and that, after all, Gordon was a man, and not a spiritual abstraction.

Thus ended the first eventful year of General Gordon's tenure of the post of Governor-General of the Soudan. Some idea of the magnitude of the task he had performed may be gathered from the fact that during this period he rode nearly 4000 miles on his camel through the desert. He put before himself the solution of eight burning questions, and by the end of 1877 he had settled five of them more or less permanently. He had also effected many reforms in the military and civil branches of the administration, and had formed the nucleus of a force in which he could put some confidence. By the people he was respected and feared, and far more liked than he imagined. "Send us another Governor like Gordon" was the burden of the Soudanese cry to Slatin when the shadow of the Mahdi's power had already fallen over the land. He had respected their religion and prejudices. When their Mahommedan co-religionists had ground them down to the dust, even desecrating their mosques by turning them into powder magazines, General Gordon showed them justice and merciful consideration, restored and endowed their mosques, and exhorted them in every way to be faithful to the observance of their religion. He was always most exact in payment for services rendered. This became known; and when some of the Egyptian officials – a Pasha among others – seized camels for his service without paying for them, the owners threw themselves on the ground, kissing Gordon's camel's feet, told their tale, and

obtained prompt redress. What more striking testimony to his thoughtfulness for others could be given than in the following anecdote? One of his native lieutenants, a confirmed drunkard, but of which Gordon was ignorant, became ill, and the Governor-General went to see and sit by him in his tent. All the man asked for was brandy, and General Gordon, somewhat shocked at the repeated request, expostulated with him that he, a believer in the Koran, should drink the strong waters so expressly forbidden by that holy book. But the man readily replied, "This is as medicine, and the Prophet does not forbid us to save life." Gordon said nothing, but left the tent, and some hours later he sent the man two bottles of brandy from his own small store. Even the Soudanese, who were afraid of him in his terrible mood, knew the many soft corners he kept in his heart, and easily learnt the way to them. For misfortune and suffering of every kind his sympathy was quickly won, and with his sympathy went his support, to the utmost limit of his power.

After the campaign in Darfour, Gordon returned to Khartoum, where he was preparing for fresh exertions, as well as for a settlement of the Abyssinian difficulty, when a sudden and unexpected summons reached him to come down to Cairo and help the Khedive to arrange his financial affairs. The Khedive's telegram stated that the Egyptian creditors were trying to interfere with his sovereign prerogative, and that His Highness knew no one but Gordon who could assist him out of this position. The precise date on which this telegram reached

Gordon was 25th January 1878, when he was passing Shendy – the place on the Nile opposite Metammeh, where the British Expedition encamped in January 1885 – but as he had to return to Khartoum to arrange for the conduct of the administration during his absence, he did not arrive at Dongola on his way to the capital until the 20th of the following month. He reached Cairo on 7th March, was at once carried off to dine with the Khedive, who had waited more than an hour over the appointed time for him because his train was late, and, when it was over, was conveyed to one of the finest palaces, which had been specially prepared in his honour. The meaning of this extraordinary reception was that the Khedive Ismail thought he had found a deliverer from his own troubles in the man who had done such wonders in the Soudan. That ruler had reached a stage in his affairs when extrication was impossible, if the creditors of Egypt were to receive their dues. He was very astute, and he probably saw that the only chance of saving himself was for some high authority to declare that the interests of himself and his people must be pronounced paramount to those of the foreign investors. There was only one man in the world likely to come to that conclusion, with a spotless reputation and a voice to which public opinion might be expected to pay heed. That man was Gordon. Therefore he was sent for in post haste, and found the post of President of "An Inquiry into the State of the Finances of the Country" thrust upon him before he had shaken off the dust of his long journey to Cairo.

The motives which induced the Khedive to send for General Gordon cannot be mistaken; nor is there any obscurity as to those which led General Gordon to accept a task in which he was bound to run counter to the views of every other European authority, and still more to the fixed policy of his and other Governments. In the first place, Gordon being the servant of the Khedive, it would have been impossible for him to have said no to a request which was entitled to be regarded as a command. In the second place, Gordon did not know all the currents of intrigue working between Cairo and the capitals of Europe, and he convinced himself that a sound workable plan for the benefit of Egypt and her people would command such general approval that "the financial cormorants," as he termed the bondholders, or rather their leaders, would have to retire beaten from the field. He had no doubt that he could draw up such a plan, based on a suspension and permanent reduction of interest, and the result will convince any disinterested person of the fact, but Gordon was destined to find that all persons cannot be guided by such disinterestedness as his, of which the way he treated his Egyptian salary furnished such a striking instance. When sent to the Equator, he was offered £10,000 a year, and accepted £2000; as Governor-General, he was nominated at £12,000 a year, and cut it down to a half; and when, during this very Cairo visit, a new and unnecessary official was appointed under the Soudan Administration, he insisted that his own salary should be further reduced to £3000, to compensate for this further charge. Such an

example as this did not arouse enthusiasm or inspire emulation in the Delta. General Gordon never dealt with a question in which abstract justice was deemed more out of place, or had less chance of carrying the day.

As the matter was very important, and interested persons might easily have misrepresented his part in it, General Gordon drew up a memorandum explaining every incident in the course of the affair. This document was published by his brother, Sir Henry Gordon, in 1886, and the following description merely summarises its contents.

As far back as the year 1875 the Khedive Ismail began to discover that the financial position of his Government was bad, and that it would be impossible to keep up the payment of the interest on the debt at the high rate of seven per cent., which Egypt had bound itself to pay. He therefore applied to the British Government for advice and assistance. In response to his representations, a Financial Commission, composed of three members – Mr Cave, Colonel Stokes, and Mr Rivers Wilson – was sent to Egypt for the purpose of inquiring into the financial position of that country. They had no difficulty in coming to the conclusion that it was unsound, and that the uneasiness of Ismail Pasha had not been expressed a day too soon. They recommended that an arrangement should be come to with the bondholders by which all the loans were to be placed on the same footing, and the rate of interest reduced to some figure that might be agreed upon. It then became necessary to negotiate with the

bondholders, who appointed Mr Goschen for the English section, and M. Joubert for the French, to look after their rights. The result of their efforts in 1876 was that they united the loans into one, bearing a uniform rate of six per cent, instead of seven, and that four Commissioners were appointed to look after the debt in the interests of the bondholders, while two other European officials were nominated – one to control the receipts, the other the expenditure. In less than two years Ismail Pasha discovered that this arrangement had not remedied the evil, and that the Government was again on the verge of bankruptcy. It was at this juncture that the Khedive applied to General Gordon, in the hope that his ability and reputation would provide an easy escape from his dilemma.

General Gordon agreed to accept the post of President of this Commission of Inquiry, and he also fell in with the Khedive's own wish and suggestion that the Commissioners of the Debt should not be members of the Commission. This point must be carefully borne in mind, as the whole negotiation failed because of the Khedive's weakness in waiving the very point he rightly deemed vital for success. Having laid down the only principle to which he attached importance, the Khedive went on to say that M. de Lesseps would act in conjunction with General Gordon, and that these two, with some vague assistance from financial experts, were to form the Commission. It soon became evident that M. de Lesseps had no serious views on the subject, and that he was only too much disposed to yield to external influences.

On the very threshold of his task, which he took up with his usual thoroughness and honest desire to get at the truth, General Gordon received a warning that the greatest difficulties were not those inherent to the subject, but those arising from the selfish designs of interested persons. As soon as it became known that General Gordon had accepted this task, and that he had agreed to the Khedive's suggestion that the Debt Commissioners were not to sit on the Commission, there was a loud outburst of disapproval and dismay in diplomatic and financial circles. This part of the story must be given in his own words: —

> "Mr Vivian, the English Consul-General, said to me, 'I wonder you could accept the Presidency of the Commission of Inquiry without the Commissioners of the Debt.' I said, 'I was free to accept or refuse.'
>
> "I then called on the German Consul-General, and when there the French and Austrian Consuls-General, and also Vivian, came in, and attacked me for having accepted the post of President. I said 'I was free.' And then they said, 'I was risking his Highness his throne; that he ran a very serious risk personally, if he formed the Commission of Inquiry without the creditors' representatives, viz. the Commissioners of the Debt.' I said, 'Why do you not tell him so?' They said, 'You ought to do so.' I said, 'Well, will you commission me to do so, from you, with any remarks I like to make as to the futility of your words?' They all said, 'Yes, we authorise you to do so – in our names.'"

General Gordon went that evening to the Abdin Palace, where

he was engaged to dine with the Khedive; and having asked permission to make an important communication, saw Ismail before dinner, when words to this effect were exchanged: —

Gordon said: "I have seen the four Consuls-General to-day, and they told me to tell your Highness from them that you run a serious personal risk if you have a Commission of Inquiry without the Commissioners of Debt being upon it."

The Khedive replied as follows: "I do not care a bit. I am only afraid of England, and I feel sure she will not move. You will see Lesseps to-morrow, and arrange the *enquête* with him." Encouraged by the Khedive's firmness, and fully convinced that no good result would follow if the Debt Commissioners, who only considered the bondholders' interests, were on this inquiry, Gordon met Lesseps the next morning in the full expectation that business would now be begun. The further ramifications of the intrigue, for it soon became one, for the discomfiture and discrediting of Gordon, must be told in his own words:

> "The next day Lesseps came to my Palace with Stanton (Stokes's old Danube Secretary, now Resident-Commissioner for the British Government Suez Canal Shares at Paris, an old friend of mine). Lesseps began, 'We must have the Commissioners of the Debt on the *enquête*.'
>
> "I said, 'It is a *sine quâ non* that they are not to be upon it.' Lesseps replied, 'They must be upon it.'
>
> "Then in came Cherif Pasha (the Premier), and said, 'Are you agreed?' I left Lesseps to speak, and he said, 'Yes,' at which I stared and said, 'I fear not.' Then Lesseps and

Cherif discussed it, and Lesseps gave in, and agreed to serve on the Commission without the Commissioners of the Debt, but with the proviso that he would ask permission to do so from Paris. Cherif Pasha was pleased.

"But I instinctively felt old Lesseps was ratting, so I asked Cherif to stop a moment, and said to Stanton, 'Now, see that Lesseps does not make a mess of it. Let him say at once, Will he act without the Commissioners of Debt or not? Do this for my sake; take him into that corner and speak to him.' Stanton did so, while I took Cherif into the other corner, much against his will, for he thought I was a bore, raising obstacles. I told him that Lesseps had declared before he came that he would not act unless with the Commissioners of the Debt. Cherif was huffed with me, and turned to Lesseps, whom Stanton had already dosed in his corner of the room, and he and Lesseps had a close conversation again for some time; and then Cherif came to me and said, 'Lesseps has accepted without the Commissioners of the Debt.'

"I disgusted Cherif as I went downstairs with him by saying, 'He will never stick to it.'"

If Gordon was not a diplomatist, he was at least very clear-sighted. He saw clearly through M. de Lesseps, who had no views on the subject, and who was quite content to play the part his Government assigned him. A few minutes after the interview described he obtained further evidence of the hostility the projected inquiry without the Commissioners had aroused. He met Major Evelyn Baring, then beginning the Egyptian career

which he still pursues as Lord Cromer, who was desirous of knowing what decision had been arrived at. On hearing that the Commissioners were to be excluded, Major Baring remarked, "It was unfair to the creditors," which seems to have drawn from Gordon some angry retort. There is no doubt that at this moment Gordon lost all control over himself, and employed personalities that left a sore feeling behind them. That they did so in this case was, as I am compelled to show later on, amply demonstrated in December 1883 and January 1884. The direct and immediate significance of the occurrence lay in its furnishing fresh evidence of the unanimity of hostility with which all the European officials in the Delta regarded the Khedive's proposal, and his attempt to make use of General Gordon's exceptional character and reputation. It is a reflection on no particular individual to assert that they were all resolved that General Gordon's appeal to the abstract sense of justice of the world should never be promulgated.

The first practical proposal made was to telegraph for Mr Samuel Laing, a trained financier, who had acted in India at the head of the finances of that country; but General Gordon refused to do this, because he knew that he would be held responsible for the terms he came on; and instead he drew up several propositions, one of them being that the services of Mr Laing should be secured on conditions to be fixed by the Khedive. During this discussion, it should be noted, Lesseps paid no attention to business, talking of trivial and extraneous matters.

Then Gordon, with the view of clinching the matter, said:

> "There are two questions to decide:
>
> "*First*, How to alleviate the present sufferings of the unpaid civil employés and of the army, as well as the pressing claims of the floating debt.
>
> "*Second*, And afterwards to inquire into the real state of the revenue by a Commission."

This was the exact opposite of the bondholders' view, for the settlement of the grievances of the public and military service and of the floating debt would *then* have left nothing for the payment of the coupons on the permanent external debt of a hundred millions. In fact, General Gordon boldly suggested that the funds immediately wanted must be provided by the non-payment of the next coupon due.

It is impossible to resist the conclusion that if General Gordon had had his way, the Arabi revolt would have been averted; the Khedive Ismail, the ablest member of his house, would not have been deposed; and an English occupation of Egypt, hampered by financial and diplomatic shackles that neutralise the value of its temporary possession, need never have been undertaken. But *dis aliter visum*. It is equally impossible to resist the conclusion that the forces arrayed against Gordon on this occasion were such as he could not expect to conquer.

The concluding scenes of the affair need only be briefly described. M. de Lesseps had never swerved from his original purpose to refer the matter to Paris, but even Gordon was not

prepared for the duplicity he showed in the matter, and in which he was no doubt encouraged by the prevalent feeling among the foreigners at Cairo. The first point in all tortuous diplomacy, Eastern or Western, is to gain time; and when General Gordon, intent on business, called on Lesseps the next day – that is to say, two days after his arrival from Khartoum – the French engineer met him with the smiling observation that he was off for a day in the country, and that he had just sent a telegram to Paris. He handed Gordon a copy, which was to this effect: "His Highness the Khedive has begged me to join with M. Gordon and *the Commissioners of the Debt* in making an inquiry into the finances of Egypt; I ask permission." Gordon's astonished ejaculation "This will never do" was met with the light-hearted Frenchman's remark, "I must go, and it must go."

Then General Gordon hastened with the news and the draft of the telegram to the Khedive. The copy was sent in to Ismail Pasha in his private apartments. On mastering its contents, he rushed out, threw himself on a sofa, and exclaimed, "I am quite upset by this telegram of Lesseps; some one must go after him and tell him not to send it." Then turning to Gordon, he said, "I put the whole affair into your hands." Gordon, anxious to help the Khedive, and also hoping to find an ally out of Egypt, telegraphed at great length to Mr Goschen, in accordance with the Khedive's suggestion. Unfortunately, Mr Goschen replied with equal brevity and authority, "I will not look at you; the matter is in the hands of Her Majesty's Government."

When we remember that Gordon was the properly-appointed representative of an independent Prince, or at least of a Prince independent of England, we cannot wonder at his terming this a "rude answer." Mr Goschen may have had some after-qualms himself, for he telegraphed some days later in a milder tone, but Gordon would not take an affront from any man, and left it unanswered.

At this crisis Gordon, nothing daunted, made a proposal which, if the Khedive had had the courage to carry it out, might have left the victory with them. He proposed to the Khedive to issue a decree suspending the payment of the coupon, paying all pressing claims, and stating that he did all this on the advice of Gordon. Failing that, Gordon offered to telegraph himself to Lord Derby, the Foreign Secretary, and accept the full responsibility for the measure. Ismail was not equal to the occasion. He shut himself up in his harem for two days, and, as Gordon said, "the game was lost."

General Gordon was now to experience the illimitable extent of human ingratitude. Even those who disagreed with the views he expressed on this subject cannot deny his loyalty to the Khedive, or the magnitude of the efforts he made on his behalf. To carry out the wishes of the Prince in whose service he was for the time being, he was prepared to accept every responsibility, and to show an unswerving devotion in a way that excited the opposition and hostility even of those whom he might otherwise have termed his friends and well-wishers. By

an extreme expedient, which would either have ruined himself or thwarted the plans of powerful statesmen, and financiers not less powerful, he would have sealed his devotion to Ismail Pasha; but the moral or physical weakness of the Oriental prevented the attempt being made. The delay mentioned allowed of fresh pressure being brought to bear on the Khedive; and while Gordon emphatically declared, partly from a sense of consistency, and partly because he hoped to stiffen the Khedive's resolution that he would not act with the Debt Commissioners on the Inquiry, Ismail Pasha was coerced or induced into surrendering all he had been fighting for. He gave his assent to the Commissioners being on the Inquiry, and he turned his back on the man who had come from the heart of Africa to his assistance. When Gordon learnt these facts, he resolved to return to the Soudan, and he was allowed to do so without the least mark of honour or word of thanks from the Khedive. His financial episode cost him £800 out of his own pocket, and even if we consider that the financial situation in the Delta, with all its cross-currents of shady intrigue and selfish designs, was one that he was not quite qualified to deal with, we cannot dispute that his propositions were full of all his habitual nobility of purpose, and that they were practical, if they could ever have been put into effect.

This incident serves to bring out some of the limitations of Gordon's ability. His own convictions, strengthened by the solitary life he had led for years in the Soudan, did not make him well adapted for any form of diplomacy. His methods were

too simple, and his remedies too exclusively based on a radical treatment, to suit every complaint in a complicated state of society; nor is it possible for the majority of men to be influenced by his extraordinary self-abnegation and disregard for money. During this very mission he boasted that he was able to get to bed at eight o'clock, because he never dined out, and that he did not care at everyone laughing at him, and saying he was in the sulks. This mode of living was due, not to any peculiarity about General Gordon – although I trace to this period the opinion that he was mad – but mainly to his honest wish not to be biassed by any European's judgment, and to be able to give the Khedive absolutely independent advice, as if he himself were an Egyptian, speaking and acting for Egypt. Enough has been said to explain why he failed to accomplish a really impossible task. Nor is it necessary to assume that because they differed from him and strenuously opposed his project, the other Englishmen in authority in the Delta were influenced by any unworthy motives or pursued a policy that was either reprehensible or unsound.

From this uncongenial task General Gordon returned to the work which he thoroughly understood, and with regard to which he had to apprehend no serious outside interference, for the attraction of the flesh-pots of Egypt did not extend into the Soudan. Still, he felt that his "outspokenness," as he termed it, had not strengthened his position. He travelled on this occasion by the Red Sea route to Aden, thence to Zeila, with the view of inspecting Harrar, which formed part of his extensive

Government. During this tour Gordon saw much that disquieted him – a large strip of country held by fanatical Mahommedans, the slave trade in unchecked progress where he had not thought it to exist – and he wrote these memorable words: "Our English Government lives on a hand-to-mouth policy. They are very ignorant of these lands, yet some day or other they or some other Government will have to know them, for things at Cairo cannot stay as they are. His Highness will be curbed in, and will no longer be absolute sovereign; then will come the question of these countries."

At Harrar, Gordon dismissed the Governor Raouf, whom he describes as a regular tyrant, but who, none the less for his misdeeds, was proclaimed Governor-General of the Soudan when Gordon left it less than two years after this visit to Harrar. When this affair was settled, General Gordon proceeded *via* Massowah and Souakim to Khartoum, where he arrived about the middle of June. On his way he had felt bound to remove eight high military officers from their commands for various offences, from which may be gathered some idea of the colleagues on whom he had to depend. He reached Khartoum not a moment too soon, for the first news that greeted him was that Suleiman had broken out in open revolt, and was practically master of the Province of Bahr Gazelle, which lies between Darfour and the Equatorial Province.

But before describing the steps he took to suppress this formidable revolt, which resembled the rising under the Mahdi in

every point except its non-religious character, some notice may be given of the financial difficulties with which he had to cope, and which were much increased by the Khedive's practice of giving appointments in a promiscuous manner that were to be chargeable on the scanty and inadequate revenues of the Soudan.

In the year 1877 the expenditure of the Soudan exceeded the revenue by over a quarter of a million sterling; in 1878 Gordon had reduced this deficit to £70,000. In the return given by the Khedive of his resources when foreign intervention first took place, it was stated that the Soudan furnished a tribute of £143,000. This was untrue; it had always been a drain on the Cairo exchequer until in 1879 General Gordon had the satisfaction, by reducing expenditure in every possible direction and abolishing sinecures, of securing an exact balance. The most formidable adversary Gordon had to meet in the course of this financial struggle was the Khedive himself, and it was only by sustained effort that he succeeded in averting the imposition of various expenses on his shoulders which would have rendered success impossible. First it was two steamers, which would have cost £20,000; then it was the so-called Soudan railway, with a liability of not less than three quarters of a million with which the Khedive wished to saddle the Soudan, but Gordon would have neither, and his firmness carried the day. When the Cairo authorities, in want of money, claimed that the Soudan owed £30,000, he went into the items, and showed that, instead, Cairo owed it £9000. He never got it, but by this he proved that, while

he was the servant of the Khedive, he would not be subservient to him in matters that affected the successful discharge of his task as that Prince's deputy in the Soudan.

We must now return to the revolt of Suleiman, the most serious military peril Gordon had to deal with in Africa, which was in its main features similar to the later uprising under the Mahdi. At the first collision with that young leader of the slave-dealers, Gordon had triumphed by his quickness and daring; but he had seen that Suleiman was not thoroughly cowed, and he had warned him that if he revolted again the result would inevitably be his ruin. Suleiman had not taken the warning to heart, and was now in open revolt. His most powerful supporters were the Arab colonies, long settled in interior Africa, who, proud of their descent, were always willing to take part against the Turco-Egyptian Government. These men rallied to a certain extent to Suleiman, just as some years later they attached themselves to the Mahdi. As General Gordon wrote in 1878: "They were ready, and are still ready, to seize the first chance of shaking off the yoke of Egypt." It was during Gordon's absence at Cairo that Suleiman's plans matured, and he began the campaign by seizing the province of Bahr Gazelle. Immediately on receiving this intelligence, General Gordon fitted out an expedition; and as he could not take the command himself, he intrusted it to his best lieutenant, Romolo Gessi, an Italian of proved merit.

Natural difficulties retarded the advance of the expedition. Heavy floods kept Gessi confined in his camp during three

months, and the lukewarm supporters of the Government regarded this inaction as proof of inferiority. They consequently rallied to Suleiman, who soon found himself at the head of a force of 6000 men, while Gessi had only 300 regulars, two cannon, and 700 almost useless irregulars. It was as difficult for him to let the Governor-General know that he needed reinforcements as it was for General Gordon to send them. Some of his subordinates, in command of outlying detachments, refused to obey his summons, preferring to carry on a little slave-hunting on their own account. His troops were on the verge of mutiny: he had to shoot one ringleader with his own hand.

At last the floods fell, and he began his forward movement, fighting his way against detached bodies of slave-hunters, but after each success receiving the welcome of the unfortunate natives, of whom Suleiman had consigned not fewer than 10,000 in the six previous months to slavery. At last Gessi was himself compelled to halt at a place called Dem Idris, fifty miles north of the fort which Suleiman had constructed for his final stand, and named after himself. These places are about 200 miles south of both Dara and Shaka, while between them runs the considerable stream called Bahr Arab. Gessi was now in close proximity to the main force under Suleiman, but he had to halt for five months before he felt in any way equal to the task of attacking it. During that period he had to stand on the defensive, and sustain several attacks from Suleiman, who had made all his plans for invading Darfour, and adding that province to the Bahr Gazelle.

The first of these engagements was that fought on 28th December 1878, when Suleiman, at the head of 10,000 men, attacked Gessi's camp at Dem Idris. Fortunately, he had neglected no precaution, and his regulars, supported by a strong force of friendly natives, nobly seconded his efforts. Suleiman's force was repulsed in four assaults, and had to retire with a loss of 1000 men. But Gessi's difficulties were far from removed by this victory. Suleiman's losses were easily repaired, while those of Gessi could not be replaced. His men were also suffering from fever, and the strain on himself, through the absence of any subordinates to assist him, was terrible. It was a relief to him when Suleiman delivered his second attack, fifteen days after the first. On this occasion Suleiman appealed to the religious fanaticism of his followers, and made them swear on the Koran to conquer or die; and the black troops, as the less trustworthy, were placed in the van of battle and driven to the assault by the Arabs. Gessi made an excellent disposition of his troops, repulsing the two main attacks with heavy loss; and when the attack was resumed the next day, his success was equally complete. Unfortunately, Gessi was unable to follow up this advantage, because his powder was almost exhausted, and his men were reduced to pick up bullets from the field of combat. Tidings of his position reached Suleiman, who made a final attack on the 28th of January 1879, but owing to the fortunate arrival of a small supply of powder, Gessi was able to fight and win another battle.

It was not until the 11th March, however, that Gessi received a sufficient supply of ammunition to enable him to assume the offensive. Suleiman's camp or fort was a strongly barricaded enclosure, surrounded by a double row of trunks of trees. The centre of the enclosure was occupied by an inner fort, which was Suleiman's own residence. On Gessi attacking it, his first shell set fire to one of the huts, and as the wood was dry, the whole encampment was soon in a blaze. Driven to desperation, the brigands sallied forth, only to be driven back by the steady fire of Gessi's troops, who by this time were full of confidence in their leader. Then the former broke into flight, escaping wherever they could. Suleiman was among those who escaped, although eleven of his chiefs were slain, and the unfortunate exhaustion of Gessi's powder again provided him with the respite to rally his followers and make another bid for power.

This further period of enforced inaction terminated at the end of April, when the arrival of a full supply of powder and cartridges enabled Gessi to take the field for the last time. On the 1st May the Egyptian commander started to attack the slave robber in his last stronghold, Dem Suleiman. Three days later he fought the first of these final battles outside that fort, and succeeded in cutting off the retreat of the vanquished Arabs into that place of shelter. He then broke into the fort itself, where there were only a few men, and he almost succeeded in capturing Suleiman, who fled through one gate as Gessi entered by another. Thanks to the fleetness of his horse, Suleiman succeeded in

making good his escape. Before his hurried flight Suleiman murdered four prisoners sooner than allow of their recapture, and throughout the long pursuit that now began all slaves or black troops who could not keep up were killed. These were not the only crimes perpetrated by these brigands. Superstition, or the mere pleasure of cruelty, had induced them when their fortunes were getting low to consecrate a new banner by bathing it in the blood of a murdered child. For these iniquities the hour of expiation had now arrived.

After the capture of Dem Suleiman, Gessi began a pursuit which, considering the difficulties of the route owing to heavy rain, topographical ignorance, and the deficiency of supplies, may be characterised as remarkable. Gessi took with him only 600 men, armed with Remington rifles; but they could carry no more than three or four days' provisions, which were exhausted before he came up with even the rearmost of the fugitive Arabs. There the troops turned sulky, and it was only by promising them as spoil everything taken that he restored them to something like good temper. Six days after the start Gessi overwhelmed one band under Abou Sammat, one of the most active of the slave-hunters, and learnt that Suleiman himself was only twenty-four hours ahead. But the difficulties were such that Gessi was almost reduced to despair of the capture of that leader, and as long as he remained at large the rebellion could not be considered suppressed.

Fortune played the game into his hand at the very moment

that the result seemed hopeless. In the middle of the night several men came to his camp from Sultan Idris, one of the Arab chiefs, thinking it was that of Rabi, the chief of Suleiman's lieutenants. Gessi sent one of them back to invite him to approach, and at once laid his own plans. He resolved to destroy Rabi's force, which lay encamped close by, before the other band could come up; and by a sudden assault at daybreak he succeeded in his object. The whole band was exterminated, with the exception of Rabi himself, who escaped on a fast horse. Then Gessi laid his ambuscade for Sultan Idris, who marched into the trap prepared for him. This band also was nearly annihilated, but Sultan Idris escaped, leaving, however, an immense spoil, which put the Egyptian soldiers in good humour. For the disposal of this booty, and for other reasons, Gessi resolved to return to Dem Suleiman.

At this point it was alone possible to criticise the action of the energetic Gessi during the whole course of the campaign, and General Gordon no doubt thought that if he had paid no attention to the spoil captured from Rabi and Sultan Idris, but pressed the pursuit against Suleiman, he might then and there have concluded the campaign. On the other hand, it is only fair to state that Gessi had to consider the sentiment of his own troops, while he was also ill from the mental strain and physical exertion of conducting the campaign virtually by himself. The spoil, moreover, did not benefit him in the least. It went into the coffers of the Government, or the pockets of the soldiers, not into his. So little reward did he receive that Gordon intended at

first to give him £1000 out of his own pocket, and eventually found himself able to increase it to a sum of £2000 out of the Soudan exchequer.

But Suleiman was still at large, and the slave-dealers were fully determined to preserve their profitable monopoly, if by any means they could baffle the Government. The Egyptian officials were also inclined to assist their efforts, and while Gessi was recovering his strength, he had the mortification of seeing the fruits of his earlier success lost by the inaction or more culpable proceedings of his lieutenants. It was not until July 1879 that Gessi felt able to take the field in person, and then with less than 300 men, while Suleiman's band alone numbered 900. But there was no time to wait for reinforcements if Suleiman, who had advanced to within a short distance of Gessi's camp, was to be captured. Owing to the promptitude of his measures, Gessi came up with Suleiman in three days' time at the village of Gara, which he reached at daybreak on 16th of July. His measures were prompt and decisive. Concealing his troops in a wood, so that the smallness of their numbers might not be detected, he sent in a summons to Suleiman to surrender within ten minutes. Surprised, and ignorant of the strength of the Egyptian force, he and his followers agreed to lay down their arms: but when Suleiman saw the mere handful of men to whom he had yielded, he burst out crying. The situation suggested to him the hope of escape. Gessi learnt that when night came Suleiman and his men had arranged to break their way through. He therefore resolved

to anticipate them. He held in his hands the ringleaders of the rebellion. If they escaped, all his work was lost; a summary act of justice would conclude the affair, and secure the Government against fresh attacks for a long time. To use his own words, Gessi "saw that the time had come to have done with these people once for all."

He divided the captives into three bands. The first, composed of the black soldiers, little better than slaves, he released on the condition that they left at once and promised to settle down to a peaceful life. This they agreed to joyfully. Having got rid of these, the larger number of Suleiman's band, he seized the smaller body of slave-dealers – 157 in number – and having chained them, sent them under a guard as prisoners to his own camp. Then he seized Suleiman and ten of his chief supporters, and shot them on the spot. Thus perished Suleiman, the son of Zebehr, in whose name and for whose safety he had gone into revolt, in the very way that Gordon had predicted two years before in the midst of his brigand power at Shaka; and thus, with a remarkable combination of skill and courage, did Gessi bring his arduous campaign of twelve months' duration to a victorious conclusion.

Although the credit of these successful operations was entirely due to Gessi, it must not be supposed that General Gordon took no part in controlling them; but, for the sake of clearness, it seemed advisable to narrate the history of the campaign against Suleiman without a break. Early in 1879, when Gessi, after

obtaining some successes, had been reduced to inaction from the want of ammunition, Gordon's anxiety became so great on his account that he determined to assume the command in person. His main object was to afford relief to Gessi by taking the field in Darfour, and putting down the rebels in that province, who were on the point of throwing in their lot with Suleiman. Gordon determined therefore to march on Shaka, the old headquarters of Zebehr and his son. On his march he rescued several slave caravans, but he saw that the suppression of the slave trade was not popular, and the contradictory character of the law and his instructions placed him in much embarrassment. Still, he saw clearly that Darfour was the true heart of the slave trade, as the supply from Inner Africa had to pass through it to Egypt, and he thought that a solution might be found for the difficulty by requiring every one of the inhabitants to have a permission of residence, and every traveller a passport for himself and his followers. But neither time nor the conditions of his post allowed of his carrying out this suggestion. It remains, however, a simple practical measure to be borne in mind when the solution of the slave difficulty is taken finally in hand by a Government in earnest on the subject, and powerful enough to see its orders enforced.

General Gordon reached Shaka on 7th April, and at once issued a notice to the slave-dealers to quit that advantageous station. He also sent forward reinforcements of men and stores to Gessi, but in a few days they returned, with a message from

Gessi that he had received enough powder from his own base on the Nile to renew the attack on Suleiman. Within one week of Gordon's arrival not a slave-dealer remained in Shaka, and when envoys arrived from Suleiman, bearing protestations that he had never been hostile to the Egyptian Government, he promptly arrested them and sent them for trial by court-martial. Their guilt as conspirers against the Khedive was easily proved, and they were shot. Their fate was fully deserved, but Gordon would have spared their lives if Suleiman had not himself slain so many hostages and helpless captives.

Gordon's final operations for the suppression of the slave trade in Darfour, carried on while Gessi was engaged in his last struggle with Suleiman, resulted in the release of several thousand slaves, and the dispersal and disarmament of nearly 500 slave-dealers. In one week he rescued as many as 500 slaves, and he began to feel, as he said, that he had at last reached the heart of the evil.

But while these final successes were being achieved, he was recalled by telegraph to Cairo, where events had reached a crisis, and the days of Ismail as Khedive were numbered. It may have been the instinct of despair that led that Prince to appeal again to Gordon, but the Darfour rebellion was too grave to allow of his departure before it had been suppressed; and on the 1st July he received a telegram from the Minister Cherif, calling on him to proclaim throughout the Soudan Tewfik Pasha as Khedive. The change did not affect him in the least, he wrote, for not merely

had his personal feelings towards Ismail changed after he threw him over at Cairo, but he had found out the futility of writing to him on any subject connected with the Soudan, and with this knowledge had come a feeling of personal indifference.

On his return to Khartoum, he received tidings of the execution of Suleiman, and also of the death of the Darfourian Sultan, Haroun, so that he felt justified in assuming that complete tranquillity had settled down on the scene of war. The subsequent capture and execution of Abdulgassin proved this view to be well founded, for, with the exception of Rabi, who escaped to Borgu, he was the last of Zebehr's chief lieutenants. The shot that killed that brigand, the very man who shed the child's blood to consecrate the standard, was the last fired under Gordon's orders in the Soudan. If the slave trade was then not absolutely dead, it was doomed so long as the Egyptian authorities pursued an active repressive policy such as their great English representative had enforced. The military confederacy of Zebehr, which had at one time alarmed the Khedive in his palace at Cairo, had been broken up. The authority of the Khartoum Governor-General had been made supreme. As Gordon said, on travelling down from Khartoum in August 1879, "Not a man could lift his hand without my leave throughout the whole extent of the Soudan."

General Gordon reached Cairo on 23rd August, with the full intention of retiring from the Egyptian service; but before he could do so there remained the still unsolved Abyssinian difficulty, which had formed part of his original mission. He

therefore yielded to the request of the Khedive to proceed on a special mission to the Court of King John, then ruling that inaccessible and mysterious kingdom, and one week after his arrival at Cairo he was steaming down the Red Sea to Massowah. His instructions were contained in a letter from Tewfik Pasha to himself. After proclaiming his pacific intentions, the Khedive exhorted him "to maintain the rights of Egypt, to preserve intact the frontiers of the State, without being compelled to make any restitution to Abyssinia, and to prevent henceforth every encroachment or other act of aggression in the interests of both countries."

In order to explain the exact position of affairs in Abyssinia at this period, a brief summary must be given of events between Gordon's first overtures to King John in March 1877, and his taking up the matter finally in August 1879. As explained at the beginning of this chapter, those overtures came to nothing, because King John was called away to engage in hostilities with Menelik, King of Shoa, and now himself Negus, or Emperor of Abyssinia. In the autumn of the earlier year King John wrote Gordon a very civil letter, calling him a Christian and a brother, but containing nothing definite, and ending with the assertion that "all the world knows the Abyssinian frontier." Soon after this Walad el Michael recommenced his raids on the border, and when he obtained some success, which he owed to the assistance of one of Gordon's own subordinates, given while Gordon was making himself responsible for his good conduct,

he was congratulated by the Egyptian War Minister, and urged to prosecute the conquest of Abyssinia. Instead of attempting the impossible, he very wisely came to terms with King John, who, influenced perhaps by Gordon's advice, or more probably by his own necessities through the war with Menelik, accepted Michael's promises to respect the frontier. Michael went to the King's camp to make his submission in due form, and in the spring of 1879 it became known that he and the Abyssinian General (Ras Alula) were planning an invasion of Egyptian territory. Fortunately King John was more peacefully disposed, and still seemed anxious to come to an arrangement with General Gordon.

In January 1879 the King wrote Gordon a letter, saying that he hoped to see him soon, and he also sent an envoy to discuss matters. The Abyssinian stated very clearly that his master would not treat with the Khedive, on account of the way he had subjected his envoys at Cairo to insult and injury; but that he would negotiate with Gordon, whom he persisted in styling the "Sultan of the Soudan." King John wanted a port, the restoration of Bogos, and an Abouna or Coptic Archbishop from Alexandria, to crown him in full accordance with Abyssinian ritual. Gordon replied a port was impossible, but that he should have a Consul and facilities for traffic at Massowah; that the territory claimed was of no value, and that he certainly should have an Abouna. He also undertook to do his best to induce the British Government to restore to King John the crown of King

Theodore, which had been carried off after the fall of Magdala. The envoy then returned to Abyssinia, and nothing further took place until Gordon's departure for Massowah in August, when the rumoured plans of Michael and Ras Alula were causing some alarm.

On reaching Massowah on 6th September, Gordon found that the Abyssinians were in virtual possession of Bogos, and that if the Egyptian claims were to be asserted, it would be necessary to retake it. The situation had, however, been slightly improved by the downfall of Michael, whose treachery and covert hostility towards General Gordon would probably have led to an act of violence. But he and Ras Alula had had some quarrel, and the Abyssinian General had seized the occasion to send Michael and his officers as prisoners to the camp of King John. The chief obstacle to a satisfactory arrangement being thus removed, General Gordon hastened to have an interview with Ras Alula, and with this intention crossed the Abyssinian frontier, and proceeded to his camp at Gura. After an interview and the presentation of the Khedive's letter and his credentials, Gordon found that he was practically a prisoner, and that nothing could be accomplished save by direct negotiation with King John. He therefore offered to go to his capital at Debra Tabor, near Gondar, if Ras Alula would promise to refrain from attacking Egypt during his absence. This promise was promptly given, and in a few days it was expanded into an armistice for four months.

After six weeks' journey accomplished on mules, and by the

worst roads in the country, as Ras Alula had expressly ordered, so that the inaccessibility of the country might be made more evident, General Gordon reached Debra Tabor on 27th October. He was at once received by King John, but this first reception was of only a brief and formal character. Two days later the chief audience was given at daybreak, King John reciting his wrongs, and Gordon referring him to the Khedive's letters, which had not been read. After looking at them, the King burst out with a list of demands, culminating in the sum of £2,000,000 or the port of Massowah. When he had finished, Gordon asked him to put these demands on paper, to sign them with his seal, and to give the Khedive six months to consider them and make a reply. This King John promised to do on his return from some baths, whither he was proceeding for the sake of his health.

After a week's absence the King returned, and the negotiations were resumed. But the King would not draw up his demands, which he realised were excessive, and when he found that Gordon remained firm in his intention to uphold the rights of the Khedive, the Abyssinian became offended and rude, and told Gordon to go. Gordon did not require to be told this twice, and an hour afterwards had begun his march, intending to proceed by Galabat to Khartoum. A messenger was sent after him with a letter from the King to the Khedive, which on translating read as follows: "I have received the letters you sent me by *that man* (a term of contempt). I will not make a secret peace with you. If you want peace, ask the Sultans of Europe." With a

potentate so vague and so exacting it was impossible to attain any satisfactory result, and therefore Gordon was not sorry to depart. After nearly a fortnight's travelling, he and his small party had reached the very borders of the Soudan, their Abyssinian escort having returned, when a band of Abyssinians, owning allegiance to Ras Arya, swooped down on them, and carried them off to the village of that chief, who was the King's uncle.

The motive of this step is not clear, for Ras Arya declared that he was at feud with the King, and that he would willingly help the Egyptians to conquer the country. He however went on to explain that the seizure of Gordon's party was due to the King's order that it should not be allowed to return to Egypt by any other route than that through Massowah.

Unfortunately, the step seemed so full of menace that as a precaution Gordon felt compelled to destroy the private journal he had kept during his visit, as well as some valuable maps and plans. After leaving the district of this prince, Gordon and his small party had to make their way as best they could to get out of the country, only making their way at all by a lavish payment of money – this journey alone costing £1400 – and by submitting to be bullied and insulted by every one with the least shadow of authority. At last Massowah was reached in safety, and every one was glad, because reports had become rife as to King John's changed attitude towards Gordon, and the danger to which he was exposed. But the Khedive was too much occupied to attend to these matters, or to comply with Gordon's request

to send a regiment and a man-of-war to Massowah, as soon as the Abyssinian despot made him to all intents and purposes a prisoner. The neglect to make that demonstration not only increased the very considerable personal danger in which Gordon was placed during the whole of his mission, but it also exposed Massowah to the risk of capture if the Abyssinians had resolved to attack it.

The impressions General Gordon formed of the country were extremely unfavourable. The King was cruel and avaricious beyond all belief, and in his opinion fast going mad. The country was far less advanced than he had thought. The people were greedy, unattractive, and quarrelsome. But he detected their military qualities, and some of the merits of their organisation. "They are," he wrote, "a race of warriors, hardy, and, though utterly undisciplined, religious fanatics. I have seen many peoples, but I never met with a more fierce, savage set than these. The King said he could beat united Europe, except Russia."

The closing incidents of Gordon's tenure of the post of Governor-General of the Soudan have now to be given, and they were not characterised by that spirit of justice, to say nothing of generosity, which his splendid services and complete loyalty to the Khedive's Government demanded. During his mission into Abyssinia his natural demands for support were completely ignored, and he was left to whatever fate might befall him. When he succeeded in extricating himself from that perilous position, he found that the Khedive was so annoyed at his inability to exact

from his truculent neighbour a treaty without any accompanying concessions, that he paid no attention to him, and seized the opportunity to hasten the close of his appointment by wilfully perverting the sense of several confidential suggestions made to his Government. The plain explanation of these miserable intrigues was that the official class at Cairo, seeing that Gordon had alienated the sympathy and support of the British Foreign Office and its representatives by his staunch and outspoken defence of Ismail in 1878, realised that the moment had come to terminate his, to them, always hateful Dictatorship in the Soudan. While the Cairo papers were allowed to couple the term "mad" with his name, the Ministers went so far as to denounce his propositions as inconsistent. One of these Ministers had been Gordon's enemy for years; another had been banished by him from Khartoum for cruelty; they were one and all sympathetic to the very order of things which Gordon had destroyed, and which, as long as he retained power, would never be revived. What wonder that they should snatch the favourable opportunity of precipitating the downfall of the man they had so long feared! But it was neither creditable nor politic for the representatives of England to stand by while these schemes were executed to the detraction of the man who had then given six years' disinterested and laborious effort to the regeneration of the Soudan and the suppression of the slave trade.

When Gordon discovered that his secret representations, sent in cipher for the information of the Government, were given

to the Press with a perverted meaning and hostile criticism, he hastened to Cairo. He requested an immediate interview with Tewfik, who excused himself for what had been done by his Ministers on the ground of his youth; but General Gordon read the whole situation at a glance, and at once sent in his resignation, which was accepted. It is not probable that, under any circumstances, he would have been induced to return to the Soudan, where his work seemed done, but he certainly was willing to make another attempt to settle the Abyssinian difficulty. Without the Khedive's support, and looked at askance by his own countrymen in the Delta, called mad on this side and denounced as inconsistent on the other, no good result could have ensued, and therefore he turned his back on the scene of his long labours without a sigh, and this time even without regret.

The state of his health was such that rest, change of scene, and the discontinuance of all mental effort were imperatively necessary, in the opinion of his doctor, if a complete collapse of mental and physical power was to be avoided. He was quite a wreck, and was showing all the effects of protracted labour, the climate, and improper food. Humanly speaking, his departure from Egypt was only made in time to save his life, and therefore there was some compensation in the fact that it was hastened by official jealousy and animosity.

But it seems very extraordinary that, considering the magnitude of the task he had performed single-handed in the Soudan, and the way he had done it with a complete disregard

of all selfish interest, he should have been allowed to lay down his appointment without any manifestation of honour or respect from those he had served so long and so well. Nor was this indifference confined to Egyptians. It was reflected among the English and other European officials, who pronounced Gordon unpractical and peculiar, while in their hearts they only feared his candour and bluntness. But even public opinion at home, as reflected in the Press, seemed singularly blind to the fresh claim he had established on the admiration of the world. His China campaigns had earned him ungrudging praise, and a fame which, but for his own diffidence, would have carried him to the highest positions in the British army. But his achievements in the Soudan, not less remarkable in themselves, and obtained with far less help from others than his triumph over the Taepings, roused no enthusiasm, and received but scanty notice. The explanation of this difference is not far to seek, and reveals the baser side of human nature. In Egypt he had hurt many susceptibilities, and criticised the existing order of things. His propositions were drastic, and based on the exclusion of a costly European *régime* and the substitution of a native administration. Even his mode of suppressing the slave trade had been as original as it was fearless. Exeter Hall could not resound with cheers for a man who declared that he had bought slaves himself, and recognised the rights of others in what are called human chattels, even although that man had done more than any individual or any government to kill the slave trade at its root. It was not until his remarkable

mission to Khartoum, only four years after he left Egypt, that public opinion woke up to a sense of all he had done before, and realised, in its full extent, the magnitude and the splendour of his work as Governor-General of the Soudan.

CHAPTER IX.
MINOR MISSIONS – INDIA AND CHINA

General Gordon arrived in London at the end of January 1880 – having lingered on his home journey in order to visit Rome – resolved as far as he possibly could to take that period of rest which he had thoroughly earned, and which he so much needed. But during these last few years of his life he was to discover that the world would not leave him undisturbed in the tranquillity he desired and sought. Everyone wished to see him usefully and prominently employed for his country's good, and offers, suitable and not suitable to his character and genius, were either made to him direct, or put forward in the public Press as suggestions for the utilization of his experience and energy in the treatment of various burning questions. His numerous friends also wished to do him honour, and he found himself threatened with being drawn into the vortex of London Society, for which he had little inclination, and, at that time, not even the strength and health.

After this incident he left London on 29th February for Switzerland, where he took up his residence at Lausanne, visiting *en route* at Brussels, Mr, afterwards Lord, Vivian, then Minister at the Belgian Court, who had been Consul-General in Egypt during the financial crisis episode. It is pleasant to find that

that passage had, in this case, left no ill-feeling behind it on either side, and that Gordon promised to think over the advice Mrs Vivian gave him to get married while he was staying at the Legation. His reply must not be taken as of any serious import, and was meant to turn the subject. About the same time he wrote in a private letter, "Wives! wives! what a trial you are to your husbands! From my experience married men have more or less a cowed look."

It was on this occasion that Gordon was first brought into contact with the King of the Belgians, and had his attention drawn to the prospect of suppressing the slave trade from the side of the Congo, somewhat analogous to his own project of crushing it from Zanzibar. The following unpublished letter gives an amusing account of the circumstances under which he first met King Leopold: —

"Hotel de Belle-Vue, Bruxelles,
"Tuesday, 2nd March 1880.

"I arrived here yesterday at 6 p. m., and found my baggage had not come on when I got to the hotel (having given orders about my boxes which were to arrive to-day at 9 a. m.). I found I was *detected*, and a huge card of His Majesty awaited me, inviting to dinner at 6.30 p. m. It was then 6.20 p. m. I wrote my excuses, telling the truth. Then I waited. It is now 9.30 a. m., and no baggage. King has just sent to say he will receive me at 11 a. m. I am obliged to say I cannot come if my baggage does not arrive.

"I picked up a small book here, the 'Souvenirs of Congress of Vienna,' in 1814 and 1815. It is a sad account of the festivities of that time. It shows how great people fought for invitations to the various parties, and how like a bomb fell the news of Napoleon's descent from Elba, and relates the end of some of the great men. The English great man, Castlereagh, cut his throat near Chislehurst; Alexander died mad, etc., etc. They are all in their 6 feet by 2 feet 6 inches… Horrors, it is now 10.20 a. m., and no baggage! King sent to say he will see me at 11 a. m.; remember, too, I have to dress, shave, etc., etc. 10.30 a. m. – No baggage!!! It is getting painful. His Majesty will be furious. 10.48 a. m. – No baggage! Indirectly Mackinnon (late Sir William) is the sinner, for he evidently told the King I was coming. Napoleon said, 'The smallest trifles produce the greatest results.' 12.30 p. m. – Got enclosed note from palace, and went to see the King – a very tall man with black beard. He was very civil, and I stayed with him for one and a half hours. He is quite at sea with his expedition (Congo), and I have to try and get him out of it. I have to go there to-morrow at 11.30 a. m. My baggage has come."

During his stay at Lausanne his health improved, and he lost the numbed feeling in his arms which had strengthened the impression that he suffered from *angina pectoris*. This apprehension, although retained until a very short period before his final departure from England in 1884, was ultimately discovered to be baseless. With restored health returned the old feeling of restlessness. After five weeks he found it impossible to

remain any longer in Lausanne. Again he exclaims in his letters: "Inaction is terrible to me!" and on 9th April he left that place for London.

Yet, notwithstanding his desire to return to work, or rather his feeling that he could not live in a state of inactivity, he refused the first definite suggestion that was made to him of employment. While he was still at Lausanne, the Governor of Cape Colony sent the following telegram to the Secretary of State for the Colonies: – "My Ministers wish that the post of Commandant of the Colonial Forces should be offered to Chinese Gordon." The reply to this telegram read as follows: – "The command of the Colonial Forces would probably be accepted by Chinese Gordon in the event of your Ministers desiring that the offer of it should be made to him." The Cape authorities requested that this offer might be made, and the War Office accordingly telegraphed to him as follows: "Cape Government offer command of Colonial Forces; supposed salary, £1500; your services required early." Everyone seems to have taken it as a matter of course that he would accept; but Gordon's reply was in the negative: "Thanks for telegram just received; I do not feel inclined to accept an appointment." His reasons for not accepting what seemed a desirable post are not known. They were probably due to considerations of health, although the doubt may have presented itself to his mind whether he was qualified by character to work in harmony with the Governor and Cabinet of any colony. He knew very well that all his good work had been done in an

independent and unfettered capacity, and at the Cape he must have felt that, as nominal head of the forces, he would have been fettered by red tape and local jealousies, and rendered incapable of doing any good in an anomalous position. But after events make it desirable to state and recollect the precise circumstances of this first offer to him from the Cape Government.

While at Lausanne, General Gordon's attention was much given to the study of the Eastern Question, and I am not at all sure that the real reason of his declining the Cape offer was not the hope and expectation that he might be employed in connection with a subject which he thoroughly understood and had very much at heart. He drew up a memorandum on the Treaties of San Stefano and Berlin, which, for clearness of statement, perfect grasp of a vital international question, and prophetic vision, has never been surpassed among State papers. Although written in March 1880, and in my possession a very short time afterwards, I was not permitted to publish it until September 1885, when it appeared in the *Times* of the 24th of that month. Its remarkable character was at once appreciated by public men, and Sir William Harcourt, speaking in the House four days later, testified to the extraordinary foresight with which "poor Gordon" diagnosed the case of Europe's sick man. I quote here this memorandum in its integrity: —

> "The Powers of Europe assembled at Constantinople, and recommended certain reforms to Turkey. Turkey refused to accede to these terms, the Powers withdrew,

and deliberated. Not being able to come to a decision, Russia undertook, on her own responsibility, to enforce them. England acquiesced, provided that her own interests were not interfered with. The Russo-Turkish War occurred, during which time England, in various ways, gave the Turks reason to believe that she would eventually come to their assistance. This may be disputed, but I refer to the authorities in Constantinople whether the Turks were not under the impression during the war *that England would help them, and also save them, from any serious loss eventually*. England, therefore, provided this is true, did encourage Turkey in her resistance.

"Then came the Treaty of San Stephano. It was drawn up with the intention of finishing off the rule of Turkey in Europe – there was no disguise about it; but I think that, looking at that treaty from a Russian point of view, it was a very bad one for Russia. Russia, by her own act, had trapped herself.

"By it (the Treaty of San Stephano) Russia had created a huge kingdom, or State, south of the Danube, with a port. This new Bulgarian State, being fully satisfied, would have nothing more to desire from Russia, but would have sought, by alliance with other Powers, to keep what she (Bulgaria) possessed, and would have feared Russia more than any other Power. Having a seaport, she would have leant on England and France. Being independent of Turkey, she would wish to be on good terms with her.

"Therefore I maintain, that *once* the Russo-Turkish War had been permitted, no greater obstacle could have been

presented to Russia than the maintenance of this united Bulgarian State, and I believe that the Russians felt this as well.

"I do not go into the question of the Asia Minor acquisitions by Russia, for, to all intents and purposes, the two treaties are alike. By both treaties Russia possesses the strategical points of the country, and though by the Berlin Treaty Russia gave up the strip south of Ararat, and thus does not hold the road to Persia, yet she stretches along this strip, and is only distant two days' march from the road, the value of which is merely commercial.

"By both treaties Russia obtained Batoum and the war-like tribes around it. Though the *only port* on the Black Sea between Kertch and Sinope, a distance of 1000 miles, its acquisition by Russia was never contested. It was said to be a worthless possession – 'grapes were sour.'

"I now come to the changes made in the San Stephano Treaty (which was undoubtedly, and was intended to be, the *coup de grâce* to Turkish rule in Europe) by the Treaty of Berlin.

"By the division of the two Bulgarias we prolonged, without alleviating, the agony of Turkey in Europe; we repaired the great mistake of Russia, from a Russian point of view, in making one great State of Bulgaria. We stipulated that Turkish troops, with a hostile Bulgaria to the north, and a hostile Roumelia to the south, should occupy the Balkans. I leave military men, or any men of sense, to consider this step. We restored Russia to her place, as the protector of these lands, which she had by the Treaty of San

Stephano given up. We have left the wishes of Bulgarians unsatisfied, and the countries unquiet. We have forced them to look to Russia more than to us and France, and we have lost their sympathies. And for what? It is not doubted that ere long the two States will be united. If Moldavia and Wallachia laughed at the Congress of Paris, and united while it (the Congress) was in session at Paris, is it likely Bulgaria will wait long, or hesitate to unite with Roumelia, because Europe does not wish it?

"Therefore the union of the two States is certain, only it is to be regretted that this union will give just the chance Russia wants to interfere again; and though, when the union takes place, I believe Russia will repent it, still it will always be to Russia that they will look till the union is accomplished.

"I suppose the Turks are capable of appreciating what they gained by the Treaty of Berlin. *They were fully aware that the Treaty of San Stephano was their* coup de grâce. But the Treaty of Berlin was supposed to be beneficial to them. Why? By it Turkey lost *not only Bulgaria* and *Roumelia* (for she has virtually lost it), but *Bosnia* and *Herzegovina*, while she gained the utterly impossible advantage of occupying the Balkans, with a hostile nation to north and south.

"I therefore maintain that the Treaty of Berlin did no good to Turkey, but infinite harm to Europe.

"I will now go on to the Cyprus convention, and say a few words on the bag-and-baggage policy. Turkey and Egypt are governed by a ring of Pashas, most of them Circassians, and who are perfect foreigners in Turkey. They are, for

the greater part, men who, when boys, have been bought at prices varying from £50 to £70, and who, brought up in the harems, have been pushed on by their purchasers from one grade to another. Some have been dancing boys and drummers, like Riaz and Ismail Eyoub of Egypt. I understand by bag-and-baggage policy the getting rid of, say, two hundred Pashas of this sort in Turkey, and sixty Pashas in Egypt. These men have not the least interest in the welfare of the countries; they are aliens and adventurers, they are hated by the respectable inhabitants of Turkey and Egypt, and they must be got rid of.

"Armenia is lost; it is no use thinking of reforms in it. The Russians virtually possess it; the sooner we recognise this fact the better. Why undertake the impossible?

"What should be done? Study existing facts, and decide on a definite line of policy, and follow it through. Russia, having a definite line of policy, is strong; we have not one, and are weak and vacillating. 'A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.'

"Supposing such a line of policy as follows was decided upon and followed up, it would be better than the worries of the last four years: —

"1. The complete purchase of Cyprus.

"2. The abandonment of the Asia Minor reforms.

"3. The union of Bulgaria and Roumelia, with a port.

"4. The increase of Greece.

"5. Constantinople, a State, under European guarantees.

"6. Increase of Montenegro, and Italy, on that coast.

"7. Annexation of Egypt by England, *either directly or by*

having paramount and entire authority.

"8. Annexation of Syria by France – ditto – ditto – ditto. (By this means France would be as interested in stopping Russian progress as England is.)

"9. Italy to be allowed to extend towards Abyssinia.

"10. Re-establishment of the Turkish Constitution, and the establishment of a similar one in Egypt (these Constitutions, if not interfered with, would soon rid Turkey and Egypt of their parasite Pashas).

"I daresay this programme could be improved, but it has the advantage of being *definite*, and a definite policy, however imperfect, is better than an unstable or hand-to-mouth policy.

"I would not press these points at once; I would keep them in view, and let events work themselves out.

"I believe, in time, this programme could be worked out without a shot being fired.

"I believe it would be quite possible to come to terms with Russia on these questions; I do not think she has sailed under false colours when her acts and words are generally considered. She is the avowed enemy of Turkey, she has not disguised it. Have *we* been the friend of Turkey? How many years have elapsed between the Crimean war and the Russo-Turkish war? What did we do to press Turkey to carry out reforms (as promised by the Treaty of 1856) in those years? *Absolutely nothing.*

"What has to be done to prevent the inevitable crash of the Turkish Empire which is impending, imperilling the peace of the world, is *the re-establishment of the Constitution*

of Midhat, and its maintenance, in spite of the Sultan. By this means, when the Sultan and the ring of Pashas fall, there would still exist the chambers of representatives of the provinces, who would carry on the Government for a time, and at any rate prevent the foreign occupation of Constantinople, or any disorders there, incident on the exit of the Sultan and his Pashas."

Having partially explained how General Gordon declined one post for which he appeared to be well suited, I have to describe how it was that he accepted another for which neither by training nor by character was he in the least degree fitted. The exact train of trifling circumstances that led up to the proposal that Gordon should accompany the newly-appointed Viceroy, the Marquis of Ripon, to India cannot be traced, because it is impossible to assign to each its correct importance. But it may be said generally, that the prevalent idea was that Lord Ripon was going out to the East on a great mission of reform, and some one suggested that the character of that mission would be raised in the eyes of the public if so well known a philanthropist as Gordon, whose views on all subjects were free from official bias, could be associated with it. I do not know whether the idea originated with Sir Bruce Seton, Lord Ripon's secretary, while at the War Office, but in any case that gentleman first broached the proposition to Sir Henry Gordon, the eldest brother of General Gordon. Sir Henry not merely did not repel the suggestion, but he consented to put it before his brother and to support it. For his

responsibility in this affair Sir Henry afterwards took the fullest and frankest blame on himself for his "bad advice." When the matter was put before General Gordon he did not reject it, as might have been expected, but whether from his desire to return to active employment, or biassed by his brother's views in favour of the project, or merely from coming to a decision without reflection, he made up his mind at once to accept the offer, and the official announcement of the appointment was made on 1st May, with the additional statement that his departure would take place without delay, as he was to sail with Lord Ripon on the 14th of that month.

It was after his acceptance of this post, and not some months before, as has been erroneously stated, that General Gordon had an interview with the Prince of Wales under circumstances that may be described. The Prince gave a large dinner-party to Lord Ripon before his departure for India, and Gordon was invited. He declined the invitation, and also declined to give any reason for doing so. The Prince of Wales, with his unfailing tact and the genuine kindness with which he always makes allowance for such little breaches of what ought to be done, at least in the cases of exceptional persons like Gordon, sent him a message: "If you won't dine with me, will you come and see me next Sunday afternoon?" Gordon went, and had a very interesting conversation with the Prince, and in the middle of it the Princess came into the room, and then the Princesses, her daughters, who said they would "like to shake hands with Colonel Gordon."

Before even the departure Gordon realised he had made a mistake, and if there had been any way out of the dilemma he would not have been slow to take it. As there was not, he fell back on the hope that he might be able to discharge his uncongenial duties for a brief period, and then seek some convenient opportunity of retiring. But as to his own real views of his mistake, and of his unfitness for the post, there never was any doubt, and they found expression when, in the midst of a family gathering, he exclaimed: "Up to this I have been an independent comet, now I shall be a chained satellite."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.