

HALL SIR CAINE

THE WHITE PROPHET,
VOLUME I (OF 2)

Hall Caine

The White Prophet, Volume I (of 2)

«Public Domain»

Caine H.

The White Prophet, Volume I (of 2) / H. Caine — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

FIRST BOOK	5
CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	9
CHAPTER III	14
CHAPTER IV	17
CHAPTER V	21
CHAPTER VI	25
CHAPTER VII	29
CHAPTER VIII	32
CHAPTER IX	34
CHAPTER X	37
CHAPTER XI	40
CHAPTER XII	42
CHAPTER XIII	43
CHAPTER XIV	46
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	47

Hall Caine

The White Prophet, Volume I (of 2)

FIRST BOOK

THE CRESCENT AND THE CROSS

CHAPTER I

It was perhaps the first act of open hostility, and there was really nothing in the scene or circumstance to provoke an unfriendly demonstration.

On the broad racing ground of the Khedivial Club a number of the officers and men of the British Army quartered in Cairo, assisted by a detachment of the soldiers of the Army of Egypt, had been giving a sham fight in imitation of the battle of Omdurman, which is understood to have been the death-struggle and the end of Mahdism.

The Khedive himself had not been there – he was away at Constantinople – and his box had stood empty the whole afternoon; but a kinsman of the Khedive with a company of friends had occupied the box adjoining, and Lord Nuneham, the British Consul-General, had sat in the centre of the grand pavilion, surrounded by all the great ones of the earth in a sea of muslin, flowers, and feathers. There had been European ladies in bright spring costumes; Sheikhs in flowing robes of flowered silk; Egyptian Ministers of State in Western dress, and British Advisers and Under-Secretaries in Eastern tarbooshes; officers in gold-braided uniforms, Foreign Ambassadors, and an infinite number of Pashas, Beys, and Effendis.

Besides these, too, there had been a great crowd of what are called the common people, chiefly Cairenes, the volatile, pleasure-loving people of Cairo, who care for nothing so little as the atmosphere of political trouble. They had stood in a thick line around the arena, all capped in crimson, thus giving to the vast ellipse the effect of an immense picture framed in red.

There had been nothing in the day, either, to stimulate the spirit of insurrection. It had been a lazy day, growing hot in the afternoon, so that the white city of domes and minarets, as far up as the Mokattam Hills and the self-conscious Citadel, had seemed to palpitate in a glistening haze, while the steely ribbon of the Nile that ran between was reddening in the rays of the sunset.

General Graves, an elderly man with martial bearing, commanding the army in Egypt, had taken his place as Umpire in the Judge's box in front of the pavilion; four squadrons of British and Egyptian cavalry, a force of infantry, and a grunting and ruckling camel corps had marched and pranced and bumped out of a paddock to the left, and then young Colonel Gordon Lord, Assistant Adjutant-General, who was to play the part of Commandant in the sham fight, had come trotting into the field.

Down to that moment there had been nothing but gaiety and the spirit of fun among the spectators, who with ripples of merry laughter had whispered "Littleton's," "Wauchope's," "Macdonald's," and "Maxwell's," as the white-faced and yellow-faced squadrons had taken their places. Then the General had rung the big bell that was to be the signal for the beginning of the battle, a bugle had been sounded, and the people had pretended to shiver as they smiled.

But all at once the atmosphere had changed. From somewhere on the right had come the *tum, tum, tum* of the war drums of the enemy, followed by the *boom, boom, boom* of their war-horns, a melancholy note, half bellow and half wail. Then everybody in the pavilion had stood up, everybody's

glass had been out, and a moment afterwards a line of strange white things had been seen fluttering in the far distance.

Were they banners? No! They were men, they were the dervishes, and they were coming down in a deep white line, like sheeted ghosts in battle array.

"They're here!" said the spectators in a hushed whisper, and from that moment onward to the end there had been no more laughter either in the pavilion or in the dense line around the field.

The dervishes had come galloping on, a huge disorderly horde in flying white garments, some of them black as ink, some brown as bronze, brandishing their glistening spears, their swords, and their flintlocks, beating their war-drams, blowing their war-horns, and shouting in high-pitched, rasping, raucous voices their war-cry and their prayer, "Allah! Allah! Allah!"

On and on they had come, like champing surf rolling in on a reef-bound coast; on and on, faster and faster, louder and louder; on and on until they had all but hurled themselves into the British lines, and then —*crash!* a sheet of blinding flashes, a roll of stifling smoke, and, when the air cleared, a long empty space in the front line of the dervishes, and the ground strewn as with the drapery of two hundred dead men.

In an instant the gap had been filled and the mighty horde had come on again, but again and again and yet again they had been swept down before the solid rock of the British forces like the spent waves of an angry sea.

At one moment a flag, silver-white and glistening in the sun, had been seen coming up behind. It had seemed to float here, there, and everywhere, like a disembodied spirit, through the churning breakers of the enemy, and while the swarthy Arab who carried it had cried out over the thunder of battle that it was the Angel of Death leading them to victory or Paradise, the dervishes had screamed "Allah! Allah!" and poured themselves afresh on to the British lines.

But *crash, crash, crash!* the British rifles had spoken, and the dervishes had fallen in long swathes, like grass before the scythe, until the broad field had been white with its harvest of the dead.

The sham fight had lasted a full hour, and until it was over the vast multitude of spectators had been as one immense creature that trembled without drawing breath. But then the Umpire's big bell had been rung again, the dead men had leapt briskly to their feet and scampered back to paddock, and a rustling breeze of laughter, half merriment and half surprise, had swept over the pavilion and the field.

This was another moment at which the atmosphere had seemed to change. Some one at the foot of the pavilion had said —

"Whew: What a battle it must have been!"

And some one else had said —

"Don't call it a battle, sir — call it an execution."

And then a third, an Englishman, in the uniform of an Egyptian Commandant of Police, had cried —

"If it had gone the other way, though — if the Mahdists had beaten us that day at Omdurman, what would have happened to Egypt then?"

"Happened?" the first speaker had answered — he was the English Adviser to one of the Egyptian Ministers — "What would have happened to Egypt, you say? Why, there wouldn't have been a dog to howl for a lost master by this time."

Lord Nuneham had heard the luckless words, and his square-hewn jaw had grown harder and more grim. Unfortunately the Egyptian Ministers, the Sheikhs, the Pashas, the Beys, and the Effendis had heard them also, and by the mysterious law of nature that sends messages over a trackless desert, the last biting phrase had seemed to go like an electric whisper through the thick line of the red-capped Cairenes around the arena.

In the native mind it altered everything in an instant; transformed the sham battle into a serious incident; made it an insult, an outrage, a pre-arranged political innuendo, something got up by the

British Army of Occupation or perhaps by the Consul-General himself to rebuke the Egyptians for the fires of disaffection that had smouldered in their midst for years, and to say as by visible historiography —

"See, that's what England saved Egypt from – that horde of Allah-intoxicated fanatics who would have cut off the heads of your Khedives, tortured and pillaged your Pashas, flogged your Effendis, made slaves of your fellaheen, or swept your whole nation into the Nile."

Every soldier on the field had distinguished himself that day – the British by his bull-dog courage, the Soudanese by fighting as dervishes like demons, the Egyptian by standing his ground like a man; but not even when young Colonel Lord, the most popular Englishman in Egypt, the one officer of English blood who was beloved by the Egyptians – not even when he had come riding back to paddock after a masterly handling of his men, sweating but smiling, his horse blowing and spent, the people on the pavilion receiving him with shouts and cheers, the clapping of hands, and the fluttering of handkerchiefs – not even then had the Cairenes at the edge of the arena made the faintest demonstration. Their opportunity came a few minutes later, and, sullen and grim under the gall of their unfounded suspicion, they seized it in fierce and rather ugly fashion.

Hardly had the last man left the field when a company of mounted police came riding down the fringe of it, followed by a carriage drawn by two high-stepping horses, between a body-guard of Egyptian soldiers. They drew up in front of the box occupied by the kinsman of the Khedive, and instantly the Cairenes made a rush for it, besieging the barrier on either side, and even clambering on each other's shoulders as human scaffolding from which to witness the departure of the Prince.

Then the Prince came out, a rather slack, feeble, ineffectual-looking man, and there were the ordinary salutations prescribed by custom. First the cry from the police in Turkish and in unison, "Long live our Master!" being cheers for the Khedive whose representative the Prince was, and then a cry in Arabic for the Prince himself. The Prince touched his forehead, stepped into his carriage, and was about to drive off when, without sign or premeditation, by one of those mischievous impulses which the devil himself inspires, there came a third cry never heard on that ground before. In a lusty, guttural voice, a young man standing on the shoulders of another man, both apparently students of law or medicine, shouted over the heads of the people, "Long live Egypt!" and in an instant the cry was repeated in a deafening roar from every side.

The Prince signalled to his body-guard and his carriage started, but all the way down the line of the enclosure, where the red-capped Egyptians were still standing in solid masses, the words cracked along like fireworks set alight.

The people on the great pavilion watched and listened, and to the larger part of them, who were British subjects, and to the Officers, Advisers, and Under-Secretaries, who were British officials, the cry was like a challenge which seemed to say, "Go home to England; we are a nation of ourselves, and can do without you." For a moment the air tingled with expectancy, and everybody knew that something else was going to happen. It happened instantly, with that promptness which the devil alone contrives.

Almost as soon as the Prince's company had cleared away, a second carriage, that of the British Consul-General, came down the line to the pavilion, with a posse of native police on either side and a sais running in front. Then from his seat in the centre Lord Nuneham rose and stepped down to the arena, shaking hands with people as he passed, gallant to the ladies as befits an English gentleman, but bearing himself with a certain brusque condescension towards the men, all trying to attract his attention – a medium-sized yet massive person, with a stern jaw and steady grey eyes, behind which the cool brain was plainly packed in ice – a man of iron who had clearly passed through the pathway of life with a firm, high step.

The posse of native police cleared a way for him, and under the orders of an officer rendered military honours, but that was not enough for the British contingent in the fever of their present excitement. They called for three cheers for the King, whose representative the Consul-General was

in Egypt, and then three more for Lord Nuneham, giving not three but six, with a fierceness that grew more frantic at every shout, and seemed to say, as plainly as words could speak, "Here we are, and here we stay."

The Egyptians listened in silence, some of them spitting as a sign of contempt, until the last cheer was dying down, and then the lusty guttural voice cried again, "Long live Egypt!" and once more the words rang like a rip-rap down the line.

It was noticed that the stern expression of Lord Nuneham's face assumed a death-like rigidity, that he took out a pocket-book, wrote some words, tore away a leaf, handed it to a native servant, and then, with an icy smile, stepped into his carriage. Meantime the British contingent were cheering again with yet more deafening clamour, and the rolling sound followed the Consul-General as he drove away. But the shout of the Egyptians followed him too, and when he reached the high road the one was like muffled drums at a funeral far behind, while the other was like the sharp crack of Maxim guns that were always firing by his side.

The sea of muslin, ribbons, flowers, and feathers in the pavilion had broken up by this time, the light was striking level in people's eyes, the west was crimsoning with sunset tints, the city was red on the tips of its minarets and ablaze on the bare face of its insurgent hills, and the Nile itself, taking the colouring of the sky, was lying like an old serpent of immense size which had stretched itself along the sand to sleep.

CHAPTER II

General Graves's daughter had been at the sports that day, sitting in the chair immediately behind Lord Nuneham's. Her name was Helena, and she was a fine, handsome girl in the early twenties, with coal-black hair, very dark eyes, a speaking face, and a smile like eternal sunshine, well grown, splendidly developed, and carrying herself in perfect equipoise with natural grace and a certain swing when she walked.

Helena Graves was to marry Lord Nuneham's son, Colonel Gordon Lord, and during the progress of the sham fight she had had eyes for nobody else. She had watched him when he had entered the field, sitting solid on his Irish horse, which was stepping high and snorting audibly; when at the "Fire" he had stood behind the firing line and at the "Cease fire" galloped in front; when he had threaded his forces round and round, north, south, and west, in and out as in a dance, so that they faced the enemy on every side; when somebody had blundered and his cavalry had been caught in a trap and he had had to ride without sword or revolver through a cloud of dark heads that had sprung up as if out of the ground; and above all, when his horse had stumbled and he had fallen, and the dervishes, forgetting that the battle was not a real one, had hurled their spears like shafts of forked lightning over his head. At that moment she had forgotten all about the high society gathered in a brilliant throng around her, and had clutched the Consul-General's chair convulsively, breathing so audibly that he had heard her, and lowering the glasses through which he had watched the distant scene, had patted her arm and said —

"He's safe — don't be afraid, my child."

When the fight was over her eyes were radiant, her cheeks were like a conflagration, and, notwithstanding the ugly incident attending the departure of the Prince and Lord Nuneham, her face was full of a triumphant joy as she stepped down to the green, where Colonel Lord, who was waiting for her, put on her motor cloak — she had come in her automobile — and helped her to fix the light veil which in her excitement had fallen back from her hat and showed that she was still blushing up to the roots of her black hair.

Splendid creature as she was, Colonel Lord was a match for her. He was one of the youngest Colonels in the British Army, being four-and-thirty, of more than medium height, with crisp brown hair, and eyes of the flickering, steel-like blue that is common among enthusiastic natures, especially when they are soldiers — a man of unmistakable masculinity, yet with that vague suggestion of the woman about him which, sometimes seen in a manly face, makes one say, without knowing any of the circumstances, "That man is like his mother, and whatever her ruling passion is, his own will be, only stronger, more daring, and perhaps more dangerous."

"They're a lovely pair," the women were saying of them as they stood together, and soon they were surrounded by a group of people, some complimenting Helena, others congratulating Gordon, all condemning the demonstration which had cast a certain gloom over the concluding scene.

"It was too exciting, too fascinating; but how shameful — that conduct of the natives. It was just like a premeditated insult," said a fashionable lady, a visitor to Cairo; and then an Englishman — it was the Adviser who had spoken the first unlucky words — said promptly —

"So it was — it must have been. Didn't you see how it was all done at a pre-concerted signal?"

"I'm not surprised. I've always said we English in Egypt are living on the top of a volcano," said a small, slack, grey-headed man, a Judge in the native courts; and then the Commandant of Police, a somewhat pompous person, said bitterly —

"We saved their country from bankruptcy, their backs from the lash, and their stomachs from starvation, and now listen: 'Long live Egypt!'"

At that moment a rather effusive American lady came up to Helena and said —

"Don't you ever recognise your friends, dear? I tried to catch your eye during the fight, but a certain officer had fallen, and of course nobody else existed in the world."

"Let us make up our minds to it – we are not *liked*," the Judge was saying. "Naturally we were popular as long as we were plastering the wounds made by tyrannical masters, but the masters are dead and the patient is better, so the doctor is found to be a bore."

At that moment an Egyptian Princess, famous for her wit and daring, came down the pavilion steps. She was one of the few Egyptian women who frequented mixed society and went about with uncovered face – a large person, with plump, pallid cheeks, very voluble, outspoken, and quick-tempered, a friend and admirer of the Consul-General and a champion of the English rule. Making straight for Helena, she said —

"Goodness, child, is it your face I see or the light of the moon? The battle? Oh yes, it was beautiful, but it was terrible, and thank the Lord it is over. But tell me about yourself, dear. You are desperately in love, they say, and no wonder. I'm in love with him myself, I really am, and if ... Oh, you're there, are you? Well, I'm telling Helena I'm in love with you. Such strength, such courage —*pluck*, you call it, don't you?"

Helena had turned to answer the American lady, and Gordon, whose eyes had been on her as if waiting for her to speak, whispered to the Princess —

"Isn't she looking lovely to-day, Princess?"

"Then why don't you tell her so?" said the Princess.

"Hush!" said Gordon, whereupon the Princess said —

"My goodness, what ridiculous creatures men are! What cowards, too! As brave as lions before a horde of savages, but before a woman —*mon Dieu!*"

"Yes," said the Judge in his slow, shrill voice, "they are fond of talking of the old book of Egypt, yet the valley of the Nile is strewn with the tombs of Egyptians who have perished under their hard taskmasters from the Pharaohs to the Pashas. Can't they hear the murmur of the past about them? Have they no memory if they have no gratitude?"

At the last words General Graves came up to the group, looking hot and excited, and he said —

"Memory! Gratitude! They're a nation of ingrates and fools."

"What's that?" asked the Princess.

"Pardon me, Princess. I say the demonstration of your countrymen to-day is an example of the grossest ingratitude."

"You're quite right, General. But *Ma'aleysh!* (No matter!) The barking of dogs doesn't hurt the clouds."

"And who are the dogs in this instance, Princess?" said a thin-faced Turco-Egyptian, with a heavy moustache, who had been congratulating Colonel Lord.

"Your Turco-Egyptian beauties who would set the country ablaze to light their cigarettes," said the Princess. "Children, I call them. Children, and they deserve the rod. Yes, the rod – and serve them right. Excuse the word. I know! I tell you plainly, Pasha."

"And the clouds are the Consul-General, I suppose?"

"Certainly, and he's so much above them that they can't even see he's the sun in their sky, the stupid."

Whereupon the Pasha, who was the Egyptian Prime Minister under a British Adviser, said with a shrug and a dubious smile —

"Your sentiments are beautiful, but your similes are a little broken, Princess."

"Not half so much broken as your treasury would have been if the English hadn't helped it," said the Princess, and when the Pasha had gone off with a rather halting laugh, she said —

"*Ma'aleysh!* When angels come the devils take their leave. I don't care. I say what I think. I tell the Egyptians the English are the best friends Egypt ever had, and Nuneham is their greatest ruler since the days of Joseph. But Adam himself wasn't satisfied with Paradise, and it's no use talking.

'Don't throw stones into the well you drink from,' I say. But serve you right, you English. You shouldn't have come. He who builds on another's land brings up another's child. Everybody is excited about this sedition, and even the harem are asking what the Government is going to do. Nuneham knows best, though. Leave him alone. He'll deal with these half-educated upstarts. Upstarts – that's what I call them. Oh, I know! I speak plainly!"

"I agree with the Princess," chimed the Judge. "What is this unrest among the Egyptians due to? The education we ourselves have given them."

"Yes, teach your dog to snap and he'll soon bite you."

"These are the tares in the harvest we are reaping, and perhaps our Western grain doesn't suit this Eastern desert."

"Should think it doesn't, indeed. 'Liberty,' 'Equality,' 'Fraternity,' 'representative Institutions'! If you English come talking this nonsense to the Egyptians what can you expect? Socialism, is it? Well, if I am to be Prince, and you are to be Prince, who is to drive the donkey? Excuse the word! I know! I tell you plainly. Good-bye, my dear! You are looking perfect to-day. But then you are so happy. I can see when young people are in love by their eyes, and yours are shining like moons. After all, your Western ways are best. We choose the husbands for our girls, thinking the silly things don't know what is good for them, and the chicken isn't wiser than the hen; but it's the young people, not the old ones, who have to live together, so why shouldn't they choose for themselves?"

At that instant there passed from some remote corner of the grounds a brougham containing two shrouded figures in close white veils, and the Princess said —

"Look at that, now – that relic of barbarism! Shutting our women up like canaries in a cage, while their men are enjoying the sunshine. Life is a dancing girl – let her dance a little for all of us."

The Princess was about to go when General Graves appealed to her. The Judge had been saying —

"I should call it a religious rather than a political unrest. You may do what you will for the Moslem, but he never forgets that the hand which bestows his benefits is that of an infidel."

"Yes, we're aliens here, there's no getting over it," said the Adviser.

And the General said, "Especially when professional fanatics are always reminding the Egyptians that we are not Mohammedans. By the way, Princess, have you heard of the new preacher, the new prophet, the new Mahdi, as they say?"

"Prophet! Mahdi! Another of them?"

"Yes, the comet that has just appeared in the firmament of Alexandria."

"Some holy man, I suppose. Oh, I know. Holy man indeed! Shake hands with him and count your rings, General! Another impostor riding on the people's backs, and they can't see it, the stupid! But the camel never can see his hump – not he! Good-bye, girl. Get married soon and keep together as long as you can. Stretch your legs to the length of your bed, my dear – why shouldn't you? Say good-bye to Gordon? ... Certainly, where is he?"

At that moment Gordon was listening with head down to something the General was saying with intense feeling.

"The only way to deal with religious impostors who sow disaffection among the people is to suppress them with a strong hand. Why not? Fear of their followers? They're fit for nothing but to pray in their mosques, 'Away with the English, O Lord, but give us water in due measure!' Fight? Not for an instant! There isn't an ounce of courage in a hundred of them, and a score of good soldiers would sweep all the native Egyptians of Alexandria into the sea."

Then Gordon, who had not yet spoken, lifted his head and answered, in a rather nervous voice —

"No, no, no, sir! Ill usage may have made these people cowards in the old days, but proper treatment since has made them men, and there wasn't an Egyptian fellah on the field to-day who wouldn't have followed me into the jaws of death if I had told him to. As for our being aliens in religion" – the nervous voice became louder and at the same time more tremulous – "that isn't

everything. We're aliens in sympathy and brotherhood and even in common courtesy as well. What is the honest truth about us? Here we are to help the Egyptians to regenerate their country, yet we neither eat nor drink nor associate with them. How can we hope to win their hearts while we hold them at arm's length? We've given them water, yes, water in abundance, but have we given them – love?"

The woman in Gordon had leapt out before he knew it, and he had swung a little aside as if ashamed, while the men cleared their throats, and the Princess, notwithstanding that she had been abusing her own people, suddenly melted in the eyes, and muttered to herself, "Oh, our God!" and then, reaching over to kiss Helena, whispered in her ear —

"You've got the best of the bunch, my dear, and if England would only send us a few more of his sort we should hear less of 'Long live Egypt.' Now, General, you can see me to my carriage if you would like to. By-bye, young people!"

At that moment the native servant to whom the Consul-General had given the note came up and gave it to Gordon, who read it and then handed it to Helena. It ran —

"Come to me immediately. Have something to say to you. – N."

"We'll drive you to the Agency in the car," said Helena, and they moved away together.

In a crowded lane at the back of the pavilion people were clamouring for their carriages and complaining of the idleness and even rudeness of the Arab runners, but Helena's automobile was brought up instantly, and when it was moving off, with the General inside, Helena at the wheel, and Gordon by her side, the natives touched their foreheads to the Colonel and said, "*Bismillah!*"

As soon as the car was clear away, and Gordon was alone with Helena for the first time, there was one of those privateering passages of love between them which lovers know how to smuggle through even in public and the eye of day.

"Well!"

"Well!"

"Everybody has been saying the sweetest things to me and you've never yet uttered a word."

"Did you really expect me to speak – there – before all those people? But it was splendid, glorious, magnificent!" And then, the steering-wheel notwithstanding, her gauntleted left hand went down to where his right hand was waiting for it.

Crossing the iron bridge over the river, they drew up at the British Agency, a large, ponderous, uninspired edifice, with its ambuscaded back to the city and its defiant front to the Nile, and there, as Gordon got down, the General, who still looked hot and excited, said —

"You'll dine with us to-night, my boy – usual hour, you know?"

"With pleasure, sir," said Gordon, and then Helena leaned over and whispered —

"May I guess what your father is going to talk about?"

"The demonstration?"

"Oh no!"

"What then?"

"The new prophet at Alexandria."

"I wonder," said Gordon, and with a wave of the hand he disappeared behind a screen of purple blossom, as Helena and the General faced home.

Their way lay up through the old city, where groups of aggressive young students, at sight of the General's gold-laced cap, started afresh the Kentish fire of their "Long live Egypt," up and up until they reached the threatening old fortress on the spur of the Mokattani Hills, and then through the iron-clamped gates to the wide courtyard where the mosque of Mohammed Ali, with its spikey minarets, stands on the edge of the ramparts like a cock getting ready to crow, and drew up at the gate of a heavy-lidded house which looks sleepily down on the city, the sinuous Nile, the sweeping desert, the preponderating Pyramids, and the last saluting of the sun. Then as Helena rose from her seat she saw that the General's head had fallen back and his face was scarlet.

"Father, you are ill."

"Only a little faint – I'll be better presently."

But he stumbled in stepping out of the car, and Helena said —

"You *are* ill, and you must go to bed immediately, and let me put Gordon off until to-morrow."

"No, let him come. I want to hear what the Consul-General had to say to him."

In spite of himself he had to go to bed, though, and half-an-hour later, having given him a sedative, Helena was saying —

"You've over-excited yourself again, Father. You were anxious about Gordon when his horse fell and those abominable spears were flying about."

"Not a bit of it. I knew he would come out all right. The fighting devil isn't civilised out of the British blood yet, thank God! But those Egyptians at the end – the ingrates, the dastards!"

"Father!"

"Oh, I am calm enough now – don't be afraid, girl. I was sorry to hear Gordon standing up for them, though. A soldier every inch of him, but how unlike his father! Never saw father and son so different. Yet so much alike too! Fighting men both of them, Hope to goodness they'll never come to grips. Heavens! that would be a bad day for all of us."

And then drowsily, under the influence of the medicine —

"I wonder what Nuneham wanted with Gordon! Something about those graceless tarbooshes, I suppose. He'll make them smart for what they've done to-day. Wonderful man, Nuneham! Wonderful!"

CHAPTER III

John Nuneham was the elder son of a financier of whose earlier life little or nothing was ever learned. What was known of his later life was that he had amassed a fortune by colonial speculation, bought a London newspaper, and been made a baronet for services to his political party. Having no inclination towards journalism the son became a soldier, rose quickly to the rank of Brevet-Major, served several years with his regiment abroad, and at six-and-twenty went to India as Private Secretary to the Viceroy, who, quickly recognising his natural tendency, transferred him to the administrative side and put him on the financial staff. There he spent five years with conspicuous success, obtaining rapid promotion, and being frequently mentioned in the Viceroy's reports to the Foreign Minister.

Then his father died, without leaving a will, as the cable of the solicitors informed him, and he returned to administer the estate. Here a thunderbolt fell on him, for he found a younger brother, with whom he had nothing in common and had never lived at peace, preparing to dispute his right to his father's title and fortune on the assumption that he was illegitimate, that is to say, was born before the date of the marriage of his parents.

The allegation proved to be only too well founded, and as soon as the elder brother had recovered from the shock of the truth, he appealed to the younger one to leave things as they found them.

"After all, a man's eldest son is his eldest son – let matters rest," he urged; but his brother was obdurate. "Nobody knows what the circumstances may have been – is there no ground of agreement?" but his brother could see none.

"You can take the inheritance, if that's what you want, but let me find a way to keep the title so as to save the family and avoid scandal"; but his brother was unyielding.

"For our father's sake – it is not for a man's sons to rake up the dead past of his forgotten life"; but the younger brother could not be stirred.

"For our mother's sake – nobody wants his mother's good name to be smirched, least of all when she's in her grave"; but the younger brother remained unmoved.

"I promise never to marry. The title shall end with me. It shall return to you or to your children"; but the younger brother would not listen.

"England is the only Christian country in the world in which a man's son is not always his son – for God's sake let me keep my father's name?"

"It is mine, and mine alone," said the younger brother, and then a heavy and solitary tear, the last he was to shed for forty years, dropped slowly down John Nuneham's hard-drawn face, for at that instant the well of his heart ran dry.

"As you will," he said. "But if it is your pride that is doing this I shall humble it, and if it is your greed I shall live long enough to make it ashamed."

From that day forward he dedicated his life to one object only, the founding of a family that should far eclipse the family of his brother, and his first step towards that end was to drop his father's surname in the register of his regiment and assume his mother's name of Lord.

At that moment England with two other European Powers had, like Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego, entered the fiery furnace of Egyptian affairs, though not so much to withstand as to protect the worship of the golden image. A line of Khedives, each seeking his own advantage, had culminated in one more unscrupulous and tyrannical than the rest, who had seized the lands of the people, borrowed money upon them in Europe, wasted it in wicked personal extravagance, as well as in reckless imperial expenditure that had not yet had time to yield a return, and thus brought the country to the brink of ruin, with the result that England was left alone at last to occupy Egypt, much as Rome occupied Palestine, and to find a man to administer her affairs in a position analogous to that

of Pontius Pilate. It found him in John Lord, the young Financial Secretary who had distinguished himself in India.

His task was one of immense difficulty, for though nominally no more than the British Consul-General, he was really the ruler of the country, being representative of the sovereign whose soldiers held Egypt in their grip. Realising at once that he was the official receiver to a bankrupt nation, he saw that his first duty was to make it solvent. He did make it solvent. In less than five years Egypt was able to pay her debt to Europe. Therefore Europe was satisfied, England was pleased, and John Lord was made Knight of the Order of St. Michael and St. George.

Then he married a New England girl whom he had met in Cairo, daughter of a Federal General in the Civil War, a gentle creature, rather delicate, a little sentimental, and very religious.

During the first years their marriage was childless, and the wife, seeing with a woman's sure eyes that her husband's hope had been for a child, began to live within herself, and to weep when no one could see. But at last a child came, and it was a son, and she was overjoyed and the Consul-General was content. He allowed her to christen the child by what name she pleased, so she gave him the name of her great Christian hero, Charles George Gordon. They called the boy Gordon, and the little mother was very happy.

But her health became still more delicate, so a nurse had to be looked for, and they found one in an Egyptian woman – with a child of her own – who, by power of a pernicious law of Mohammedan countries, had been divorced through no fault of hers, at the whim of a husband who wished to marry another wife. Thus Hagar, with her little Ishmael, became foster-mother to the Consul-General's son, and the two children were suckled together and slept in the same cot.

Years passed, during which the boy grew up like a little Arab in the Englishman's house, while his mother devoted herself more and more to the exercises of her religion, and his father, without failing in affectionate attention to either of them, seemed to bury his love for both too deep in his heart and to seal it with a seal, although the Egyptian nurse was sometimes startled late at night by seeing the Consul-General coming noiselessly into her room before going to his own, to see if it was well with his child.

Meantime as ruler of Egypt the Consul-General was going from strength to strength, and seeing that the Nile is the most wonderful river in the world and the father of the country through which it flows, he determined that it should do more than moisten the lips of the Egyptian desert while the vast body lay parched with thirst. Therefore he took engineers up to the fork of the stream where the clear and crystal Blue Nile of Khartoum, tumbling down in mighty torrents from the volcanic gorges of the Abyssinian hills, crosses the slow and sluggish White Nile of Omdurman, and told them to build dams, so that the water should not be wasted into the sea, but spread over the arid land, leaving the glorious sun of Egypt to do the rest.

The effect was miraculous. Nature, the great wonder-worker, had come to his aid, and never since the Spirit of God first moved upon the face of the waters had anything so marvellous been seen. The barren earth brought forth grass and the desert blossomed like a rose. Land values increased; revenues were enlarged; poor men became rich; rich men became millionaires; Egypt became a part of Europe; Cairo became a European city; the record of the progress of the country began to sound like a story from the "Arabian Nights," and the Consul-General's annual reports read like fresh chapters out of the Book of Genesis, telling of the creation of a new heaven and a new earth. The remaking of Egypt was the wonder of the world; the faces of the Egyptians were whitened; England was happy, and Sir John Lord was made a baronet. His son had gone to school in England by this time, and from Eton he was to go on to Sandhurst and to take up the career of a soldier.

Then, thinking the Englishman's mission on foreign soil was something more than to make money, the Consul-General attempted to regenerate the country. He had been sent out to re-establish the authority of the Khedive, yet he proceeded to curtail it; to suppress the insurrection of the people, yet he proceeded to enlarge their liberties. Setting up a high standard of morals, both in public and

private life, he tolerated no trickery. Finding himself in a cockpit of corruption, he put down bribery, slavery, perjury, and a hundred kinds of venality and intrigue. Having views about individual justice and equal rights before the law, he cleansed the law courts, established a Christian code of morals between man and man, and let the light of Western civilisation into the mud hut of the Egyptian fellah.

Mentally, morally, and physically his massive personality became the visible soul of Egypt. If a poor man was wronged in the remotest village he said, "I'll write to Lord," and the threat was enough. He became the visible conscience of Egypt, too, and if a rich man was tempted to do a doubtful deed he thought of "the Englishman" and the doubtful deed was not done.

The people at the top of the ladder trusted him, and the people at the bottom, a simple, credulous, kindly race, who were such as sixty centuries of mis-government had made them, touched their breasts, their lips, and their foreheads at the mention of his name, and called him "The Father of Egypt." England was proud, and Sir John Lord was made a peer.

When the King's letter reached him he took it to his wife, who now lay for long hours every day on the couch in the drawing-room, and then wrote to his son, who had left Sandhurst and was serving with his regiment in the Soudan, but he said nothing to anybody else, and left even his secretary to learn the great news through the newspapers.

He was less reserved when he came to select his title, and remembering his brother he found a fierce joy in calling himself by his father's name, thinking he had earned the right to it. Twenty-five years had passed since he had dedicated his life to the founding of a family that should eclipse and even humiliate the family of his brother, and now his secret aim was realised. He saw a long line succeeding him, his son, and his son's son, and his son's son's son, all peers of the realm, and all Nunehams. His revenge was sweet; he was very happy.

CHAPTER IV

If Lord Nuneham had died then, or if he had passed away from Egypt, he would have left an enduring fame as one of the great Englishmen who twice or thrice in a hundred years carve their names on the granite page of the world's history; but he went on and on, until it sometimes looked as if in the end it might be said of him, in the phrase of the Arab proverb, that he had written his name in water.

Having achieved one object of ambition, he set himself another, and having tasted power he became possessed by the lust of it. Great men had been in England when he first came to Egypt, and he had submitted to their instructions without demur, but now, wincing under the orders of inferior successors, he told himself, not idly boasting, that nobody in London knew his work as well as he did, and he must be liberated from the domination of Downing Street. The work of emancipation was delicate but not difficult. There was one power stronger than any Government, whereby public opinion might be guided and controlled – the press.

The British Consul-General in Cairo was in a position of peculiar advantage for guiding and controlling the press. He did guide and control it. What he thought it well that Europe should know about Egypt that it knew, and that only. The generally ill-informed public opinion in England was corrected; the faulty praise and blame of the British press was set right; within five years London had ceased to send instructions to Cairo; and when a diplomatic question created a fuss in Parliament the Consul-General was heard to say —

"I don't care a rush what the Government think, and I don't care a straw what the Foreign Minister says; I have a power stronger than either at my back – the public."

It was true, but it was also the beginning of the end. Having attained to absolute power, he began to break up from the seeds of dissolution which always hide in the heart of it. Hitherto he had governed Egypt by guiding a group of gifted Englishmen who as Secretaries and Advisers had governed the Egyptian Governors; but now he desired to govern everything himself. As a consequence the gifted men had to go, and their places were taken by subordinates whose best qualification was their subservience to his strong and masterful spirit.

Even that did not matter as long as his own strength served him. He knew and determined everything, from the terms of treaties with foreign Powers to the wages of the Khedive's English coachman. With five thousand British bayonets to enforce his will, he said to a man, "Do that," and the man did it, or left Egypt without delay. No Emperor or Czar or King was ever more powerful, no Pope more infallible; but if his rule was hard, it was also just, and for some years yet Egypt was well governed.

"When a fish goes bad," the Arabs say, "is it first at the head or at the tail?" As Lord Nuneham grew old, his health began to fail, and he had to fall back on the weaklings who were only fit to carry out his will. Then an undertone of murmuring was heard in Egypt. The Government was the same, yet it was altogether different. The hand was Esau's, but the voice was Jacob's. "The millstones are grinding," said the Egyptians, "but we see no flour."

The glowing fire of the great Englishman's fame began to turn to ashes, and a cloud no bigger than a man's hand appeared in the sky. His Advisers complained to him of friction with their Ministers; his Inspectors, returning from tours in the country, gave him reports of scant courtesy at the hands of natives, and to account for their failures they worked up in his mind the idea of a vast racial and religious conspiracy. The East was the East; the West was the West; Moslem was Moslem; Christian was Christian; Egyptians cared more about Islam than they did about good government, and Europeans in the valley of the Nile, especially British soldiers and officials, were living on the top of a volcano.

The Consul-General listened to them with a sour smile, but he believed them and blundered. He was a sick man now, and he was not really living in Egypt any longer – he was only sleeping at the Agency; and he thought he saw the work of his lifetime in danger of being undone. So, thinking to end fanaticism by one crushing example, he gave his subordinates an order like that which the ancient King of Egypt gave to the midwives, with the result that five men were hanged and a score were flogged before their screaming wives and children for an offence that had not a particle of religious or political significance.

A cry of horror went up through Egypt; the Consul-General had lost it; his forty years of great labour had been undone in a day.

As every knife is out when the bull is down, so the place-hunting Pashas, the greedy Sheikhs, and the cruel Governors whose corruptions he had suppressed found instruments to stab him, and the people who had kissed the hand they dared not bite thought it safe to bite the hand they need not kiss. He had opened the mouths of his enemies, and in Eastern manner they assailed him first by parables. Once there had been a great English eagle; its eyes were clear and piercing; its talons were firm and relentless in their grip; yet it was a proud and noble bird; it held its own against East and West, and protected all who took refuge under its wing; but now the eagle had grown old and weak; other birds, smaller and meaner, had deprived it of its feathers and picked out its eyes, and it had become blind and cruel and cowardly and sly – would nobody shoot it or shut it up in a cage?

Rightly or wrongly, the Consul-General became convinced that the Khedive was intriguing against him, and one day he drove to the royal palace and demanded an audience. The interview that followed was not the first of many stormy scenes between the real governor of Egypt and its nominal ruler, and when Lord Nuneham strode out with his face aflame, through the line of the quaking bodyguard, he left the Khedive protesting plaintively to the people of his court that he would sell up all and leave the country. At that the officials put their heads together in private, concluded that the present condition could not last, and asked themselves how, since it was useless to expect England to withdraw the Consul-General, it was possible for Egypt to get rid of him.

By this time Lord Nuneham, in the manner of all strong men growing weak, had begun to employ spies, and one day a Syrian Christian told him a secret story. He was to be assassinated. The crime was to be committed in the Opera House, under the cover of a general riot, on the night of the Khedive's State visit, when the Consul-General was always present. As usual the Khedive was to rise at the end of the first act and retire to the saloon overlooking the square; as usual he was to send for Lord Nuneham to follow him, and the moment of the Khedive's return to his box was to be the signal for a rival demonstration of English and Egyptians that was to end in the Consul-General's death. There was no reason to believe the Khedive himself was party to the plot, or that he knew anything about it, yet none the less it was necessary to stay away, to find an excuse – illness at the last moment – anything.

Lord Nuneham was not afraid, but he sent up to the Citadel for General Graves, and arranged that a battalion of infantry and a battery of artillery were to be marched down to the Opera Square at a message over the telephone from him.

"If anything happens, you know what to do," he said; and the General knew perfectly.

Then the night came, and the moment the Khedive left his palace the Consul-General heard of it. A moment later a message was received at the Citadel, and a quarter of an hour afterwards Lord Nuneham was taking his place at the Opera. The air of the house tingled with excitement, and everything seemed to justify the Syrian's story.

Sure enough, at the end of the first act the Khedive rose and retired to the saloon, and sure enough at the next moment the Consul-General was summoned to follow him. His Highness was very gracious, very agreeable, all trace of their last stormy interview being gone; and gradually Lord Nuneham drew him up to the windows overlooking the public square.

There, under the sparkling light of a dozen electric lamps, in a solid line surrounding the Opera House, stood a battalion of infantry, with the guns of the artillery facing outward at every corner; and at sight of them the Khedive caught his breath and said —

"What is the meaning of this, my lord?"

"Only a little attention to your Highness," said the Consul-General in a voice that was intended to be heard all over the room.

At that instant somebody came up hurriedly and whispered to the Khedive, who turned ashen white, ordered his carriage, and went home immediately.

Next morning at eleven, Lord Nuneham, with the same force drawn up in front of Abdeen Palace, went in to see the Khedive again.

"There's a train for Alexandria at twelve," he said, "and a steamer for Constantinople at five — your Highness will feel better for a little holiday in Europe!" and half-an-hour afterwards the Khedive, accompanied by several of his Court officials, was on his way to the railway station, with the escort, in addition to his own bodyguard, of a British regiment whose band was playing the Khedivial hymn.

He had got rid of the Khedive at a critical juncture, but he had still to deal with a sovereign that would not easily be chloroformed into silence. The Arabic press, to which he had been the first to give liberty, began to attack him openly, to vilify him, and systematically to misrepresent his actions, so that he who had been the great torch-bearer of light in a dark country saw himself called the Great Adventurer, the Tyrant, the Assassin, the worst Pharaoh Egypt had ever known — a Pharaoh surrounded by a kindergarten of false prophets, obsessed by preposterous fears of assassination and deluded by phantoms of fanaticism.

His subordinates told him that these hysterical tirades were inflaming the whole of Egypt; that their influence was in proportion to their violence; that the huge, untaught mass of the Egyptian people were listening to them; that there was not an ignorant fellah possessed of one ragged garment who did not go to the coffee-house at night to hear them read; that the lives of British officials were in peril; and that the promulgation of sedition must be stopped, or the British governance of the country could not go on.

A sombre fire shone in the Consul-General's eyes while he heard their prophecy, but he believed it all the same, and when he spoke contemptuously of incendiary articles as froth, and they answered that froth could be stained with blood, he told himself that if fools and ingrates spouting nonsense in Arabic could destroy whatever germs of civilisation he had implanted in Egypt, the doctrine of the liberty of the press was all moonshine.

And so, after sinister efforts to punish the whole people for the excesses of their journalists by enlarging the British army and making the country pay the expense, he found a means to pass a new press law, to promulgate it by help of the Prime Minister, now Regent in the Khedive's place, and to suppress every native newspaper in Egypt in one day. By that blow the Egyptians were staggered into silence, the British officials went about with stand-off manners and airs of conscious triumph, and Lord Nuneham himself, mistaking violence for power, thought he was master of Egypt once more.

But low, very low on the horizon a new planet now rose in the firmament. It was not the star of a Khedive jealous of Nuneham's power, nor of an Egyptian Minister chafing under the orders of his Under-Secretary, nor yet of a journalist vilifying England and flirting with France, but that of a simple Arab in turban and caftan, a swarthy son of the desert whose name no man had heard before, and it was rising over the dome of the mosque within whose sacred precincts neither the Consul-General nor his officials could intrude, and where the march of British soldiers could not be made. There a reverberation was being heard, a now voice was going forth, and it was echoing and re-echoing through the hushed chambers that were the heart of Islam.

When Lord Nuneham first asked about the Arab he was told that the man was one Ishmael Ameer, out of the Libyan Desert, a carpenter's son, and a fanatical, backward, unenlightened person of no consequence whatever; but with his sure eye for the political heavens, the Consul-General

perceived that a planet of no common magnitude had appeared in the Egyptian firmament, and that it would avail him nothing to have suppressed the open sedition of the newspapers if he had only driven it underground, into the mosques, where it would be a hundredfold more dangerous..

If a political agitation was not to be turned into religious unrest, if fanaticism was not to conquer civilisation and a holy war to carry the country back to its old rotten condition of bankruptcy and barbarity, that man out of the Libyan Desert must be put down. But how and by whom? He himself was old – more than seventy years old – his best days were behind him, the road in front of him must be all downhill now; and when he looked around among the sycophants who said, "Yes, my lord," "Excellent, my lord," "The very thing, my lord," for some one to fight the powers of darkness that were arrayed against him, he saw none.

It was in this mood that he had gone to the sham fight, merely because he had to show himself in public; and there, sitting immediately in front of the fine girl who was to be his daughter soon, and feeling at one moment her quick breathing on his neck, he had been suddenly caught up by the spirit of her enthusiasm and had seen his son as he had never seen him before. Putting his glasses to his eyes he had watched him – he and (as it seemed) the girl together. Such courage, such fire, such resource, such insight, such foresight! It must be the finest brain and firmest character in Egypt, and it was his own flesh and blood, his own son Gordon!

Hitherto his attitude towards Gordon had been one of placid affection, compounded partly of selfishness, being proud that he was no fool and could forge along in his profession, and pleased to think of him as the next link in the chain of the family he was founding; but now everything was changed. The right man to put down sedition was the man at his right hand. He would save England against Egyptian aggression; he would save his father too, who was old and whose strength was spent, and perhaps – why not? – he would succeed him some day and carry on the traditions of his work in the conquests of civilisation and its triumph in the dark countries of the world.

For the first time for forty years a heavy and solitary tear dropped slowly down the Consul-General's cheek, now deeply scored with lines; but no one saw it, because few dared look into his face. The man who had never unburdened himself to a living soul wished to unburden himself at last, so he scribbled his note to Gordon and then stepped into the carriage that was to take him home.

Meantime he was aware that some fool had provoked a demonstration, but that troubled him hardly at all; and while the crackling cries of "Long live Egypt!" were following him down the arena he was being borne along as by invisible wings.

Thus the two aims in the great Proconsul's life had become one, and that one aim centred in his son.

CHAPTER V

As Gordon went into the British Agency a small, wizened man with a pock-marked face, wearing Oriental dress, came out. He was the Grand Cadi (Chief Judge) of the Mohammedan courts and representative of the Sultan of Turkey in Egypt, one who had secretly hated the Consul-General and raved against the English rule for years; and as he saluted obsequiously with his honeyed voice and smiled with his crafty eyes, it flashed upon Gordon – he did not know why – that just so must Caiaphas, the high priest, have looked when he came out of Pilate's judgment hall after saying, "If thou let this man go thou art not Cæsar's friend."

Gordon leapt up the steps and into the house as one who was at home, and going first into the shaded drawing-room he found his mother on the couch looking to the sunset and the Nile – a sweet old lady in the twilight of life, with white hair, a thin face almost as white, and the pale smile of a patient soul who had suffered pain. With her, attending upon her, and at that moment handing a cup of chicken broth to her, was a stout Egyptian woman with a good homely countenance – Gordon's old nurse, Fatimah.

His mother turned at the sound of his voice, roused herself on the couch, and with that startled cry of joy which has only one note in all nature, that of a mother meeting her beloved son, she cried, "Gordon! Gordon!" and clasped her delicate hands about his neck. Before he could prevent it, his foster-mother, too, muttering in Eastern manner, "O my eye! O my soul!" had snatched one of his hands and was smothering it with kisses.

"And how is Helena?" his mother asked, in her low, sweet voice.

"Beautiful!" said Gordon.

"She couldn't help being that. But why doesn't she come to see me?"

"I think she's anxious about her father's health, and is afraid to leave him," said Gordon; and then Fatimah, with blushes showing through her Arab skin, said —

"Take care! a house may hold a hundred men, but the heart of a woman has only room for one of them."

"Ah, but Helena's heart is as wide as a well, mammy," said Gordon; whereupon Fatimah said —

"That's the way, you see! When a young man is in love there are only two sort of girls in the world – ordinary girls and his girl."

At that moment, while the women laughed, Gordon heard his father's deep voice in the hall saying, "Bid good-bye to my wife before you go, Reg," and then the Consul-General, with "Here's Gordon also," came into the drawing-room, followed by Sir Reginald Mannering, Sirdar of the Egyptian army and Governor of the Soudan, who said —

"Splendid, my boy! Not forgotten your first fight, I see! Heavens, I felt as if I was back at Omdurman and wanted to get at the demons again."

"Gordon," said the Consul-General, "see His Excellency to the door and come to me in the library;" and when the Sirdar was going out at the porch he whispered —

"Go easy with the Governor, my boy. Don't let anything cross him. Wonderful man, but I see a difference since I was down last year. Bye-bye!"

Gordon found his father writing a letter, with his *kawas* Ibrahim, in green caftan and red waistband, waiting by the side of the desk, in the library, a plain room, formal as an office, being walled with bookcases full of Blue Books, and relieved by two pictures only – a portrait of his mother when she was younger than he could remember to have seen her, and one of himself when he was a child and wore an Arab fez and slippers.

"The General – the Citadel," said the Consul-General, giving his letter to Ibrahim; and as soon as the valet was gone he wheeled his chair round to Gordon and began —

"I've been writing to your General for his formal consent, having something I wish you to do for me."

"With pleasure, sir," said Gordon.

"You know all about the riots at Alexandria?"

"Only what I've learned from the London papers, sir.

"Well, for some time past the people there have been showing signs of effervescence. First, strikes of cabmen, carters, God knows what – all concealing political issues. Then, open disorder. Europeans hustled and spat upon in the streets. A sheikh crying aloud in the public thoroughfares, 'O Moslems, come and help me to drive out the Christians.' Then a Greek merchant warned to take care, as the Arabs were going to kill the Christians that day or the day following. Then low-class Moslems shouting in the square of Mohammed Ali, 'The last day of the Christians is drawing nigh.' As a consequence there have been conflicts. The first of them was trivial, and the police scattered the rioters with a water-hose. The second was more serious, and some Europeans were wounded. The third was alarming, and several natives had to be arrested. Well, when I look for the cause I find the usual one."

"What is it, sir?" asked Gordon.

"Egypt has at all times been subject to local insurrections. They are generally of a religious character, and are set on foot by madmen who give themselves out as divinely-inspired leaders. But shall I tell you what it all means?"

"Tell me, sir," said Gordon.

The Consul-General rose from his chair and began to walk up and down the room with long strides and heavy tread.

"It means," he said, "that the Egyptians, like all other Mohammedans, are cut off by their religion from the spirit and energy of the great civilised nations – that, swathed in the bands of the Koran, the Moslem faith is like a mummy, dead to all uses of the modern world."

The Consul-General drew up sharply and continued —

"Perhaps all dogmatic religions are more or less like that, but the Christian religion has accommodated itself to the spirit of the ages, whereas Islam remains fixed, the religion of the seventh century, born in a desert and suckled in a society that was hardly better than barbarism."

He began to walk again and to talk with great animation.

"What does Islam mean? It means slavery, seclusion of women, indiscriminate divorce, unlimited polygamy, the breakdown of the family and the destruction of the nation. Well, what happens? Civilisation comes along, and it is death to all such dark ways. What next? The scheming Sheikhs, the corrupt Pashas, the tyrannical Caliphs, all the rascals and rogues who batten on corruption, the fanatics who are opponents of the light, cry out against it. Either they must lose their interests or civilisation must go. What then? Civilisation means the West, the West means Christianity. So 'Down with the Christians! O Moslems, help us to kill them!'"

The Consul-General stopped by Gordon's chair, put his hand on his son's shoulder, and said —

"There comes a time in the history of all our Mohammedan dependencies – India, Egypt, every one of them – when England has to confront a condition like that."

"And what has she to do, sir?"

The Consul-General lifted his right fist and brought it down on his left palm, and said —

"To come down with a heavy hand on the lying agitators and intriguers who are leading away the ignorant populace."

"I agree, sir. It is the agitators who should be punished, not the poor, emotional, credulous Egyptian people."

"The Egyptian people, my boy, are graceless ingrates who under the influence of momentary passion would brain their best friend with their nabouts, and go like camels before the camel-driver."

Gordon winced visibly, but only said, "Who is the camel-driver in this instance, sir?"

"A certain Ishmael Ameer, preaching in the great mosque at Alexandria, the cradle of all disaffection."

"An Alim?"

"A teacher of some sort, saying England is the deadly foe of Islam, and must therefore be driven out."

"Then he is worse than the journalists?"

"Yes, we thought of the viper, forgetting the scorpion."

"But is it certain he is so dangerous?"

"One of the leaders of his own people has just been here to say that if we let that man go on it will be death to the rule of England in Egypt."

"The Grand Cadi?"

The Consul-General nodded and then said, "The cunning rogue has a grievance of his own, I find, but what's that to me? The first duty of a government is to keep order."

"I agree," said Gordon.

"There may be picric acid in prayers as well as in bombs."

"There may."

"We have to make these fanatical preachers realise that even if the onward march of progress is but faintly heard in the sealed vaults of their mosque, civilisation is standing outside the walls with its laws and, if need be, its soldiers."

"You are satisfied, sir, that this man is likely to lead the poor, foolish people into rapine and slaughter?"

"I recognise a bird by its flight. This is another Mahdi – I see it – I feel it," said the Consul-General, and his eyes flashed and his voice echoed like a horn.

"You want me to smash the Mahdi?"

"Exactly! Your namesake wanted to smash his predecessor – romantic person – too fond of guiding his conduct by reference to the prophet Isaiah; but he was right in that, and the Government was wrong, and the consequence was the massacre you represented to-day."

"I have to arrest Ishmael Ameer?"

"That's so, in open riot if possible, and if not, by means of testimony derived from his sermons in the mosques."

"Hadn't we better begin there, sir – make sure that he is inciting the people to violence?"

"As you please!"

"You don't forget that the mosques are closed to me as a Christian?"

The Consul-General reflected for a moment and then said —

"Where's Fatimah's son, Hafiz?"

"With his regiment at Abbassiah."

"Take him with you – take two other Moslem witnesses as well."

"I'm to bring this new prophet back to Cairo?"

"That's it – bring him here – we'll do all the rest."

"What if there should be trouble with the people?"

"There's a battalion of British soldiers in Alexandria. Keep a force in readiness – under arms night and day."

"But if it should spread beyond Alexandria?"

"So much the better for you. I mean," said the Consul-General, hesitating for the first time, "we don't want bloodshed, but if it must come to that, it must, and the eyes of England will be on you. What more can a young man want? Think of yourself" – he put his hand on his son's shoulder again – "think of yourself as on the eve of crushing England's enemies and rendering a signal service to Gordon Lord as well. And now go – go up to your General and get his formal consent. My love to Helena! Fine girl, very! She's the sort of woman who might ... yes, women are the springs that move

everything in this world. Bid good-bye to your mother and get away. Lose no time. Write to me as soon as you have anything to say. That's enough for the present. I'm busy. Good day!"

Almost before Gordon had left the library the Consul-General was back at his desk – the stern, saturnine man once more, with a face that seemed to express a mind inaccessible to human emotions of any sort.

"As bright as light – sees things before one says them," he said to himself, as Gordon closed the door on going out. "Why have I wasted myself with weaklings so long?"

Gordon kissed his pale-faced mother in the drawing-room and his swarthy foster-mother in the porch, and went back to his quarters in barracks – a rather bare room with bed, desk, and bookcase, many riding boots on a shelf, several weapons of savage warfare on the walls, a dervish's suit of chain armour with a bullet-hole where the heart of the man had been, a picture of Eton, his old school, and above all, as became the home of a soldier, many photographs of his womankind – his mother with her plaintive smile, Fatimah with her humorous look, and of course Helena, with her glorious eyes – Helena, Helena, everywhere Helena.

There, taking down the receiver of a telephone, he called up the headquarters of the Egyptian army and spoke to Hafiz, his foster-brother, now a captain in the native cavalry.

"Is that you, Hafiz? ... Well, look here, I want to know if you can arrange to go with me to Alexandria for a day or two ... You can? Good! I wish you to help me to deal with that new preacher, prophet, Mahdi, what's his name now? ... That's it, Ishmael Ameer. He has been setting Moslem against Christian, and we've got to lay the gentleman by the heels before he gets the poor, credulous people into further trouble... What do you say? ... Not that kind of man, you think? ... No? ... You surprise me... Do you really mean to say ... Certainly, that's only fair ... Yes, I ought to know all about him... Your uncle? ... Chancellor of the University? ... I know, El Azhar... When could I see him? ... What day do we go to Alexandria? To-morrow if possible... To-night the only convenient time, you think? Well, I promised to dine at the Citadel, but I suppose I must write to Helena... Oh, needs must when the devil drives, old fellow... To-night, then? ... You'll come down for me immediately? Good! By-bye!"

With that he rang off and sat down to write a letter.

CHAPTER VI

Gordon Lord loved the Egyptians. Nursed on the knee of an Egyptian woman, speaking Arabic as his mother tongue, lisping the songs of Arabia before he knew a word of English, Egypt was under his very skin, and the spirit of the Nile and of the desert was in his blood.

Only once a day in his childhood was there a break in his Arab life. That was in the evening about sunset, when Fatimah took him into his father's library, and the great man with the stern face, who assumed towards him a singularly cold manner, put him through a catechism which was always the same: "Tutor been here to-day, boy?" "Yes, sir." "Done your lessons?" "Yes, sir." "English – French – everything?" "Yes, sir." "Say good-night to your mother and go to bed."

Then for a few moments more he was taken into his mother's boudoir, the cool room with the blinds down to keep out the sun, where the lady with the beautiful pale face embraced and kissed him, and made him kneel by her side while they said the Lord's Prayer together in a rustling whisper like a breeze in the garden. But, after that, off to bed with Hafiz – who in his Arab caftan and fez had been looking furtively in at the half-open door – up two steps at a time, shouting and singing in Arabic, while Fatimah, in fear of the Consul-General, cried, "Hush! Be good, now, my sweet eyes!"

In his boyhood, too, he had been half a Mohammedan, going every afternoon to fetch Hafiz home from the kuttab, the school of the mosque, and romping round the sacred place like a little king in stockinged feet, until the Sheikh in charge, who pretended as long as possible not to see him, came with a long cane to whip him out, always saying he should never come there again – until to-morrow.

While at school in England he had felt like a foreigner, wearing his silk hat on the back of his head as if it had been a tarboosh; and while at Sandhurst, where he got through his three years more easily in spite of a certain restiveness under discipline, he had always looked forward to his Christmas visits home – that is to say, to Cairo.

But at last he came back to Egypt on a great errand, with the expedition that was intended to revenge the death of his heroic namesake, having got his commission by that time, and being asked for by his father's old friend, Reginald Mannering, who was a Colonel in the Egyptian army. His joy was wild, his excitement delirious, and even the desert marches under the blazing sun and the sky of brass, killing to some of his British comrades, was a long delight to the Arab soul in him.

The first fighting he did, too, was done with an Egyptian by his side. His great chum was a young Lieutenant named Ali Awad, the son of a Pasha, a bright, intelligent, affectionate young fellow who was intensely sensitive to the contempt of British officers for the quality of the courage of their Egyptian colleagues. During the hurly-burly of the battle of Omdurman both Gordon and Ali had been eager to get at the enemy, but their Colonel had held them back, saying, "What will your fathers say to me if I allow you to go into a hell like that?" When the dervish lines had been utterly broken, though, and one coffee-coloured demon in chain armour was stealing off with his black banner, the Colonel said, "Now's your time, boys; show what stuff you are made of; bring me back that flag," and before the words were out of his mouth the young soldiers were gone.

Other things happened immediately and the Colonel had forgotten his order, when, the battle being over and the British and Egyptian army about to enter the dirty and disgusting city of the Khalifa, he became aware that Gordon Lord was riding beside him with a black banner in one hand and some broken pieces of horse's reins in the other.

"Bravo! You've got it, then," said the Colonel.

"Yes, sir," said Gordon, very sadly; and the Colonel saw that there were tears in the boy's eyes.

"What's amiss?" he said, and looking round, "Where's Ali?"

Then Gordon told him what had happened. They had captured the dervish and compelled him to give up his spear and rifle, but just as Ali was leading the man into the English lines, the demon had drawn a knife and treacherously stabbed him in the back. The boy choked with sobs while he

delivered his comrade's last message: "Say good-bye to the Colonel, and tell him Ali Awad was not a coward. I didn't let go the Baggara's horse until he stuck me, and then he had to cut the reins to get away. Show the bits of the bridle to my Colonel, and tell him I died faithful. Give my salaams to him, Charlie. I knew Charlie Gordon Lord would stay with me to the end."

The Colonel was quite broken down, but he only said, "This is no time for crying, my boy," and a moment afterwards, "What became of the dervish?" Then, for the first time, the fighting devil flashed out of Gordon's eyes and he answered —

"I killed him like a dog, sir."

It was the black flag of the Khalifa himself which Gordon had taken, and when the Commander-in-Chief sent home his despatch he mentioned the name of the young soldier who had captured it.

From that day onward for fifteen years honours fell thick on Gordon Lord. Being continually on active service, and generally in staff appointments, promotions came quickly, so that when he went to South Africa, the graveyard of so many military reputations, in those first dark days of the nation's deep humiliation when the very foundations of her army's renown seemed to be giving way, he was one of the young officers whose gallantry won back England's fame. Though hot-tempered, impetuous, and liable to frightful errors, he had the imagination of a soldier as well as the bravery that goes to the heart of a nation, so that when in due course, being now full Colonel, he was appointed, though so young, Second in Command of the Army of Occupation in Cairo, no one was surprised.

All the same he knew he owed his appointment to his father's influence, and he wrote to thank him and to say he was delighted to return to Cairo. Only at intervals had he heard from the Consul-General, and though his admiration of his father knew no limit and he thought him the greatest man in the world, he always felt there was a mist between them. Once, for a moment, had that mist seemed to be dispelled when, on his coming of age, his father wrote a letter in which he said —

"You are twenty-one years of age, Gordon, and your mother and I have been recalling the incidents of the day on which you were born. I want to tell you that from this day forward I am no longer your father; I am your friend; perhaps the best friend you will ever have; let nothing and no one come between us."

Gordon's joy on returning to Egypt was not greater than that of the Egyptians on receiving him. They were waiting in a crowd when he arrived at the railway station, a red sea of tarbooshes over faces he remembered as the faces of boys, with the face of Hafiz, now a soldier like himself, beaming by his carriage window.

It was not good form for a British officer to fraternise with the Egyptians, but Gordon shook hands with everybody and walked down the platform with his arm round Hafiz's shoulders, while the others who had come to meet him cried, "Salaam, brother!" and laughed like children.

By his own choice, and contrary to custom, quarters had been found for him in the barracks on the bank of the Nile, and the old familiar scene from there made his heart leap and tremble. It was evening when at last he was left alone, and throwing the window wide open he looked out on the river flowing like liquid gold in the sunset, with its silent boats, that looked like birds with outstretched wings, floating down without a ripple, and the violet blossom of the island on the other side spreading odours in the warm spring air.

He was watching the traffic on the bridge — the camels, the cameleers, the donkeys, the blue-shirted fellaheen, the women with tattooed chins and children astraddle on their shoulders, the water-carriers with their bodies twisted by their burdens, the Bedouins with their lean, lithe, swarthy forms and the rope round the head-shawls which descended to their shoulders — when he heard the toot of a motor-horn, and saw a white automobile threading its way through the crowd. The driver was a girl, and a veil of white chiffon which she had bound about her head instead of a hat was flying back in the light breeze, leaving her face framed within, with its big black eyes and firm but lovely mouth.

An officer in general's uniform was sitting at the back of the car, but Gordon was conscious of the man's presence without actually seeing him, so much was he struck by the spirit of the girl,

which suggested a proud strength and self-reliance, coupled with a certain high gaiety, full of energy and grace.

Gordon leaned out of his window to get a better look at her, and, quick as the glance was, he thought she looked up at him as the motor glided by. At the next instant she had gone, and it seemed to him that in one second, at one stride, the sun had gone too.

That night he dined at the British Agency, but he did not stay late, thinking his father, who looked much older, seemed preoccupied, and his mother, who appeared to be more delicate than ever, was over-exciting herself; but early next morning he rode up to the Citadel to pay his respects to his General in Command, and there a surprise awaited him. General Graves was ill and unable to see him, but his daughter came to offer his apologies – and she was the driver of the automobile.

The impression of strength and energy which the girl had made on him the evening before was deepened by this nearer view. She was fairly tall, and as she swung into the room her graceful round form seemed to be poised from the hips. This particularly struck him, and he told himself at that first moment that here was a girl who might be a soldier, with the passionate daring and chivalry of women like Joan of Arc and the Rani of Jhansi.

At the next moment he had forgotten all about that, and under the caressing smile which broke from her face and fascinated him, he was feeling as if for the first time in his life he was alone with a young and beautiful woman. They talked a long time, and he was startled by an unexpected depth in her voice, while his own voice seemed to him to have suddenly disappeared.

"You like the Egyptians – yes?" she asked.

"I love them," said Gordon. "And coming back here is like coming home. In fact, it *is* coming home. I've never been at home in England, and I love the desert, I love the Nile, I love everything and everybody."

She laughed – a fresh, ringing laugh that was one of her great charms – and told him about herself and her female friends; the Khediviah, who was so sweet, and the Princess Nazimah, who was so amusing, and finally about the Sheikh who for two years had been teaching her Arabic.

"I should have known you by your resemblance to your mother," she said, "but you are like your father, too; and then I saw you yesterday – passing the barracks, you remember."

"So you really did ... I thought our eyes –"

His ridiculous voice was getting out of all control, so he cleared his throat and got up to go, but the half smile that parted her lips and brightened her beautiful eyes seemed to say as plainly as words could speak, "Why leave so soon?"

He lingered as long as he dared, and when he took up his cap and riding-whip she threw the same chiffon veil over her head and walked with him through the garden to the gate. There they parted, and when, a little ashamed of himself, he held her soft white hand somewhat too long and pressed it slightly, he thought an answering pressure came back from her.

In three weeks they were engaged.

The General trembled when he heard what had happened, protested he was losing the only one he had in the world, asked what was to become of him when Helena had to go away with her husband, as a soldier's wife should, but finally concluded to go on half-pay and follow her, and then said to Gordon, "Speak to your father. If he is satisfied, so am I."

The Consul-General listened passively, standing with his back to the fireplace, and after a moment of silence he said —

"I've never believed in a man marrying for rank or wealth. If he has any real stuff in him he can do better than that. I didn't do it myself and I don't expect my son to do it. As for the girl, if she can do as well for her husband as she has done for her father, she'll be worth more to you than any title or any fortune. But see what your mother says. I'm busy. Good-day!"

His mother said very little; she cried all the time he was telling her, but at last she told him there was not anybody else in the world she would give him up to except Helena, because Helena was gold – pure, pure gold.

Gordon was writing to Helena now: —

"DEAREST HELENA, – Dreadfully disappointed I cannot dine with you to-night, having to go to Alexandria to-morrow, and finding it necessary to begin preparations immediately.

"You must really be a witch – your prediction proved to be exactly right – it *was* about the new Mahdi, the new prophet, my father wished to speak to me.

"The Governor thinks the man is making mischief, inciting the people to rebellion by preaching sedition, so with the General's consent I am to smash him without delay.

"Hafiz is to go with me to Alexandria, and strangely enough, he tells me over the telephone that the new prophet, as far as he can learn, is not a firebrand at all; but I am just off to see his uncle, the Chancellor of the University, and he is to tell me everything about him.

"Therefore think of me to-night as penned up in the thick atmosphere of El Azhar, *tête-à-tête*, with some sallow-faced fossil with pock-marked cheeks perhaps, when I hoped to be in the fragrant freshness of the Citadel, looking into somebody's big black eyes, you know.

"But really, my dear Nell, the way you know things without learning them is wonderful, and seems to indicate an error of nature in not making you a diplomatist, which would have given you plenty of scope for your uncanny gift of second sight.

"On second thoughts, though, I prefer you as you are and am not exactly dying to see you turned into a man.

"Maa-es-salamah! I kiss your hand!

"GORDON.

"P.S. – Your father would get a letter from the Consul-General suggesting my task, but of course I must go up for his formal order, and you might tell him I expect to be at the Citadel about tea-time to-morrow, which will enable me to kill two birds with one stone, you know, and catch the evening train as well.

"Strange if it should turn out that this new Mahdi is a wholesome influence after all, and not a person one can conscientiously put down! I have always suspected that the old Mahdi was a good man at the beginning, an enemy created by our own errors and excesses. Is history repeating itself? I wonder! And if so, what will the Consul-General say? I wonder! I wonder!"

Gordon was sealing and addressing his letter when his soldier servant brought in Hafiz, a bright young Egyptian officer, whose plump face seemed to be all smiles.

"Helloa! Here you are!" cried Gordon, and then giving his letter to his servant, he said, "Citadel – General's house, you know... And now, Hafiz, my boy, let's be off."

CHAPTER VII

El Azhar is a vast edifice that stands in the midst of the Arab quarter of Cairo like a fortress on an island rock, being surrounded by a tangled maze of narrow, dirty, unpaved streets, with a swarming population of Mohammedans of every race; and the Christian who crosses its rather forbidding portals feels that he has passed in an instant out of the twentieth century and a city of civilisation into scenes of Bible lands and the earliest years of recorded time.

It is a thousand years old, and the central seat of Moslem learning, not for Egypt only but for the whole of the kingdoms and principalities of the Mohammedan world, sending out from there the water of spiritual life that has kept the Moslem soul alive through centuries of persecution and pain.

As you approach its threshold a monotonous cadence comes out to you, the murmur of the mass of humanity within, and you feel like one who stands at the mouth of some great subterranean river whose waters have flowed with just that sound on just that spot since the old world itself was young.

It was not yet full sunset when the two young soldiers reached El Azhar, and after yellow slippers had been tied over their boots at the outer gate they entered the dim, bewildering place of vast courts and long corridors, with low roofs supported by a forest of columns, and floors covered by a vast multitude of men and boys, who were squatting on the ground in knots and circles, all talking together, teachers and pupils, and many of them swaying rhythmically to and fro to a monotonous chanting of the Koran whose verses they were learning by heart.

Picking their way through the classes on the floor, the young soldiers crossed an open quadrangle and ascended many flights of stairs until they reached the Chancellor's room in the highest roof, where the droning murmur in the courts below could be only faintly heard and the clear voice of the muezzin struck level with their faces when he came out of a minaret near by and sent into the upper air, north, south, east, and west, his call to evening prayers.

They had hardly entered this silent room, with its thick carpets on which their slippared feet made no noise, when the Chancellor came to welcome them. He was a striking figure, with his venerable face, long white beard, high forehead, refined features, graceful robes, and very soft voice, a type of the grave and dignified Oriental, such as might have walked out of the days of the prophet Samuel.

"Peace be on you!" they said.

"And on you too! Welcome!" he said, and motioned them to sit on the divans that ran round the walls.

Then Hafiz explained the object of their visit – how Gordon was ordered to Alexandria to suppress the riots there, and, if need be, to arrest the preacher who was supposed to have provoked them.

"I have already told him," said Hafiz, "that so far as I know Ishmael Ameer is no firebrand; but, hearing through the mouth of one of our own people that he is another Mahdi, threatening the rule of England in Egypt – "

"Oh, peace, my son," said the Chancellor. "Ishmael Ameer is no Mahdi. He claims no divinity."

"Then tell me, O Sheikh," said Gordon, "tell me what Ishmael Ameer is, that I may know what to do when it becomes my duty to deal with him."

Leisurely the Chancellor took snuff, leisurely he opened a folded handkerchief, dusted his nostrils, and then, in his soft voice, said —

"Ishmael Ameer is a Koranist – that is to say, one who takes the Koran as the basis of belief and keeps an open mind about tradition."

"I know," said Gordon. "We have people like that among Christians – people who take the Bible as the basis of faith and turn their backs on dogma."

"Ishmael Ameer reads the Koran by the spirit, not the letter."

"We have people like that too – the letter killeth, you know, the spirit maketh alive."

"Ishmael Ameer thinks Islam should advance with advancing progress."

"There again we are with you, O Sheikh – we have people of the same kind in Christianity."

"Ishmael Ameer thinks slavery, the seclusion of women, divorce, and polygamy are as much opposed to the teaching of Mohammed as to the progress of society."

"Excellent! My father says the same thing. *Wallahi!* (I assure you!) Or rather, he holds that Islam can never take its place as the religion of great progressive nations until it rids itself of these evils."

"Ishmael Ameer thinks the corruptions of Islam are the work of the partisans of the old barbaric ideas, who are associating the cause of religion with their own interests and passions."

"Splendid! Do you know the Consul-General is always saying that, sir?"

"Ishmael Ameer believes that if God wills it (praise be to Him, the Exalted One!) the day is not distant when an appeal to the Prophet's own words will regenerate Islam, and banish the Caliphs and Sultans whose selfishness and sensuality keep it in bondage to the powers of darkness."

"Really," said Gordon, rising impetuously to his feet, "if Ishmael Ameer says this, he is the man Egypt, India, the whole Mohammedan world, is waiting for. No wonder men like the Cadi are trying to destroy him, though that's only an instinct of self-preservation – but my father, the Consul-General ... What is there in all this to create ... Why should such teaching set Moslem against Christian?"

"Ishmael Ameer, O my brother," the Chancellor continued with the same soft voice, "thinks Islam is not the only faith that has departed from the spirit of its founder."

"True!"

"If Islam for its handmaidens has divorce and polygamy, Christianity has drunkenness and prostitution."

"No doubt – certainly."

"Coming out of the East, out of the desert, Ishmael Ameer sees in the Christianity of the West a contradiction of every principle for which your great Master fought and suffered."

Gordon sat down again.

"His was a religion of peace, but while your Christian Church prays for unity and concord among the nations your Christian States are daily increasing the instruments of destruction. His was a religion of poverty, but while your Christian priests are saying 'Blessed are the meek,' your Christian communities are struggling for wealth and trampling upon the poor in their efforts to gain it. Ishmael Ameer believes that if your great Master came back now He would not recognise in the civilisation known by His name the true posterity of the little church He founded on the shores of the Lake of Galilee."

"All this is true, too true," said Gordon, "yet under all that ... Doesn't Ishmael Ameer see that under all that –"

"Ishmael Ameer sees," said the Chancellor, "that what is known to the world as Christian civilisation is little better than an organised hypocrisy, a lust of empire in nations and a greed of gold in men, destroying liberty, morality, and truth. Therefore he warns his followers against a civilisation which comes to the East with religion in one hand and violence and avarice in the other."

"But surely he sees," said Gordon, "what Christian civilisation has done for the world, what science has done for progress; what England, for example, has done for Egypt?"

"Ishmael Ameer thinks," replied the Chancellor in the same slow, soft voice, "that the essential qualities of national greatness are moral, not material; that man does not live by bread alone; that it is of little value to Egypt that her barns are full if the hearts of her children are empty; that Egypt can afford to be patient, for she is old and eternal; that many are the events which have passed before the eyes of the crouching Sphinx; that the life of man is threescore and ten years, but when Egypt reviews her past she looks back on threescore and ten centuries."

There was silence for a moment, during which the muezzin's voice was heard again, calling the first hour of night, and then Gordon, visibly agitated, said —

"You think Ishmael Ameer a regenerator, a reformer, a redeemer of Islam; and if his preaching prevailed it would send the Grand Cadi back to his Sultan — isn't that so?" But the Chancellor made no reply.

"It would also send England out of Egypt — wouldn't it?" said Gordon, but still the Chancellor gave no sign.

"It would go farther than that perhaps — it would drive Western civilisation out of the East — wouldn't that be the end of it?" said Gordon, and then the Chancellor replied —

"It would drive a corrupt and ungodly civilisation out of the world, my son."

"I see!" said Gordon. "You think the mission of Ishmael Ameer transcends Egypt, transcends even Europe, and says to humanity in general, 'What you call civilisation is killing religion, because the nations — Christian and Moslem alike — have sold themselves to the lust of empire and the greed of gold' — isn't that what you mean?"

The Chancellor bowed his grave head, and in a scarcely audible voice said, "Yes."

"You think, too," said Gordon, whose breathing was now quick and loud, "that Ishmael Ameer is an apostle of the soul of Islam — perhaps of the soul of religion itself without respect of creed — one of the great men who come once in a hundred years to call the world back from a squalid and sordid materialism, and are ready to live, aye, and to die for their faith — the Savonarolas, the Luthers, the Gamal-ed-Deens — perhaps the Mohammeds and" (dropping his voice) "in a sense the Christs?"

But the Egyptian soul, like the mirage of the Egyptian desert, recedes as it is approached, and again the Chancellor made no reply.

"Tell me, O Sheikh," said Gordon, rising to go, "if Ishmael Ameer came to Cairo, would you permit him to preach in El Azhar?"

"He is an Alim" (a doctor of the Koran); "I could not prevent him."

"But would you lodge him in your own house?"

"Yes."

"That is enough for me. Now I must go to Alexandria and see him for myself."

"May God guide you, O my son," said the Chancellor, and a moment afterwards his soft voice was saying farewell to the two young soldiers at the door.

"Let us walk back to barracks, Hafiz," said Gordon. "My head aches a little, somehow."

CHAPTER VIII

It was night by this time; the courts and corridors of El Azhar were empty, and even the tangled streets outside were less loud than before with the guttural cries of a swarming population, but a rumbling murmur came from the mosque of the University, and the young soldiers stood a moment at the door to look in. There, under a multitude of tiny lanterns, stood long rows of men in stockinged feet and Eastern costume, rising and kneeling in unison, at one moment erect and at the next with foreheads to the floor, while the voice of the Imam echoed in the arches of the mosque and the voices of the people answered him.

Then through narrow alleys, full of life, lit only by the faint gleam of uncovered candles, with native women, black-robed and veiled, passing like shadows through a moving crowd of men, the young soldiers came to the quarter of Cairo that is nick-named the "Fish Market," where the streets are brilliantly lighted up, where the names over the shops are English and French, Greek, and Italian, and where girls with painted faces wave their hands from barred windows and call to men who sit at tables in front of the cafés opposite, drinking wine, smoking cigarettes, and playing dominoes. The sound of music and dancing came from the open windows behind the girls who glittered with gold brocade and diamonds; and among the men were young Egyptians in the tarboosh and British soldiers in khaki, who looked across at the women in the flare of the coarse light and laughed.

At the gate of the Kasr-el-Nil barracks the young men parted.

"Tell me, Hafiz," said Gordon, "if a soldier is ordered to act in a way he believes to be wrong, what is he to do?"

"His duty, I suppose," said Hafiz.

"His duty to what – his Commander or his conscience?"

"If a soldier is under orders I suppose he has no conscience?"

"I wonder!" said Gordon, and promising to write to Hafiz in the morning, he went up to his quarters.

The room was in darkness, save for the moonlight with its gleam of mellow gold, which seemed to vibrate from the river outside, and Gordon stood by the window, with a dull sense of headache, looking at the old Nile that had seen so many acts in the drama of humanity and still flowed so silently, until he became conscious of a perfume he knew, and then, switching on the light, he found a letter in a scented envelope lying on his desk. It was from Helena, and it was written in her bold, upright hand, with the gay raillery, the passionate tenderness, and the fierce earnestness which he recognised as her chief characteristics: —

"MISTER, most glorious and respected, the illustrious Colonel Lord, owner of Serenity and Virtue, otherwise dear old Gordon —

"It was wrong of you not to come to dinner, for though Father over-excited himself at Ghezirah to-day and I have had to pack him off to bed, I made every preparation to receive you, and here I am in my best bib and tucker, wearing the crown of pink blossom which my own particular Sultan says suits my gipsy hair, and nobody to admire it but my poor little black boy Mosie – who is falling in love with me, I may tell you, and is looking at me now with his scrubby face all blubbered up like a sentimental hippopotamus.

"I am not surprised that the Consul-General talked about the new 'holy man,' and I do not wonder that he ordered you to arrest him, but I am at a loss to know why you should take counsel with that old fossil at El Azhar, and you can tell Master Hafiz I mean to dust his jacket for suggesting it, knowing your silly old heart is like wax, and they have only to recite something out of the 'noble Koran' and you'll be as weak as – well, as a woman.

"As for holy men generally, I agree with the Princess that they are holy humbugs, which is the title I would give to a good many of the *genus* at home as well as here, so I say with your namesake of glorious memory (who wasn't an ogre, goodness knows!), *Smash the Mahdi!*

"A thousand to one he is some ugly, cross-eyed old fanatic, who would destroy every germ of civilisation in Egypt and carry the country back to barbarity and ruin, so I say again, *Smash the Mahdi!*

"As for your 'conscience,' I cry 'Marry-come-up!' by what right does it push its nose where it isn't wanted, seeing it is the conscience of the Consul-General that will be damned if the work is wrong and wicked and there won't be so much as a plum of Paradise for yours if it is right and good, so once again I say, *Smash the Mahdi!*

"Moreover, and furthermore, and by these presents, I rede ye beware of resisting the will of your father, for if you do, as sure as I'm a 'witch' and 'know things without learning them,' I have a 'mystic sense' there will be trouble, and nobody can say where it will end or how many of us may be involved in it, so again and yet again I say, *Smash the Mahdi!*

"The Consul-General's letter has come, but I shall not read it to Father until morning, and meantime, if I ever pass through your imagination, think of me as poor Ruth sitting on the threshing-floor with Boaz, and dreaming of Zion – that is to say, of stuffy old El Azhar, where somebody who ought to know better is now talking to an old frump in petticoats instead of to me.

"*Inshallah!* The slave of your Virtues. – HELENA.

"P.S.– Dying for to-morrow afternoon, dear.

"P.P.S.– IMPORTANT —*Smash the Mahdi!*"

CHAPTER IX

Helena Graves was everything to her father, for the General's marriage had been unhappy, and it had come to a tragic end. His wife, the daughter of a Jewish merchant in Madras, had been a woman of strong character and great beauty but of little principle, and they had been married while he was serving as senior Major with a battalion of his regiment in India, and there, Helena, their only child, had been born.

Things had gone tolerably between them until the Major returned to England as Lieutenant-Colonel commanding the battalion of his regiment at home, and then, in their little military town, they had met and become intimate with the Lord-Lieutenant of the county, a nobleman, a bachelor, a sportsman, a breeder of racehorses, and a member of the Government.

The end of that intimacy had been a violent scene, in which the husband, in his ungovernable rage, had flung the nobleman on the ground and trampled on him, torn the jewels out of his wife's breast and crushed them under his heel, and then, realising the bankruptcy his life had come to, had gone home and had brain fever.

Helena, like her father, was passionate and impetuous, and her mother had neglected and never really loved her. With the keen eyes of a child who is supposed to see nothing, she had observed from the first what was going on at home, and all her soul had risen against her mother and her mother's lover with a hatred which no presents could appease. Being now a girl of eighteen, well grown and developed, and seeing with what treachery and cruelty her father had been stricken down, her heart went out to him, and she became a woman in one day.

When the brain fever was gone, the General, weak both in body and mind, was ordered rest and change. Somebody suggested the Lake Country, as his native air, so Helena, who did everything for him, took him to a furnished cottage in Grasmere, a sweet place bowered in roses, with its face to the sedgy lake, and with the beautiful river, the Rotha, laughing and babbling by the garden at the back.

There he recovered bodily strength, but it was long before his mind returned to him, and meantime he had strange delusions. Something, perhaps, in the place of their retreat brought ghosts of the past out of a world of shadows, for he thought he was a boy again and Helena was his mother, who was thirty years dead and buried in the little churchyard lower down the stream, where the Rotha was deep and flowed with a solemn hush.

Helena played up to his pathetic delusion, took the tender endearments that were meant for the grandmother she had never known, and as his young days came to the surface with the beautiful persistence of old memories in the human mind, she fell in with them as if they had been her own. Thus on Sunday morning, when the bells rang, she would walk with him to church, holding his hand in her hand as if she were the mother and he the child.

It was very sweet to look upon, for, in the sleep of the General's brain, he was very happy, and only to those who saw that the brave girl, with her eyes of light and her lips of dew, was giving away her youth to her old father, was it charged with feeling too deep for tears.

But at length the stricken man came out of the twilight land, and his dream faded away. Helena had to play their little American organ every evening that he might sing a hymn to it, for that was what his mother had always done, when she was putting her boy to bed and thinking, like a soldier's wife, of his father who was away at the wars. It was always the same hymn, and one breathless evening, when the sun had gone down and the vale was still, they had come to —

"Hide me, O my Saviour, hide,
Till the storms of life be past" —

and then his voice stopped suddenly, and he shaded his eyes as if something were blinding them.

At that moment the past, which had been dead so long, seemed to rise from its grave, with all its mournful incidents – his wife and his shattered home – and Helena was not his mother but his daughter, and he was not a happy boy but an old soldier, with a broken life behind him.

Seeing by the look in his eyes that he was coming to himself, Helena tried to comfort him, and when he gasped, "Who is it?" she answered in a voice she tried to render cheerful, "It is I. It is Helena. Don't you know me, Father?" And then the years rolled back upon him like a flood, and he sobbed on her shoulder.

The awakening had been painful, but it was not all pain. If he had lost a wife he had gained a daughter, and she was the strongest, staunchest creature in the world. For her sake he must begin again. Having had so much shadow in her young life, she must now have sunshine. Thus Helena became her father's idol, the one thing on earth to him, and he was more to her than a father usually is to a daughter, because she had seen him in his weakness and mothered him back to strength.

Two years after the breakdown they were in London, and there Helena met Lord Nuneham on one of his few visits to England. The great Proconsul, who had heard what she had done, was most favourably impressed by her, and as she talked to him, he said to himself, "This girl has the blood of the great women of the Bible, the Deborahs who were mothers in Israel, aye, and the Jael who avenged her." At that time the post of Major-General to the British Army in Egypt was shortly to become vacant, and by Lord Nuneham's influence it was offered to Graves. Six months later father and daughter arrived in Cairo.

It had been an exciting time, but Helena had managed everything, and the General had borne up manfully until they took possession of the house assigned to them, a renovated old palace on the edge of the Citadel. Then in a moment he had collapsed, and fallen from his chair to the floor. Helena had lifted him in her strong arms, laid him on the couch, and sent his Aide-de-camp for the Medical Officer in charge.

Consciousness came back quickly, and Helena laughed through the tears that had gathered in her great eyes, but the surgeon continued to look grave.

"Has the General ever had attacks like this before?" he asked.

"Never that I know of," said Helena.

"He must be kept quiet. I'll see him in the morning."

Next day the Medical Officer had no doubts of his diagnosis – heart-disease, quite unmistakably. The news had to be broken to the General, and he bore it bravely, but thinking of Helena he made one request – that nothing should be said on the subject. If the fact were known at the War Office he might be retired, and there could be no necessity for that until the army was put on active service.

"But isn't the army always on active service in Egypt, sir?" said the surgeon.

"Technically perhaps, not really," said the General. "In any case I'm not afraid, and I ask you to keep the matter quiet."

"As you please, sir."

"You and I and Helena must be the only ones to know anything about it."

"Very well, but you must promise to take care. Any undue excitement, any over-exertion, any outburst of anger even – "

"It shall not occur – I give you my word for it," said the General.

But it had occurred, not once but frequently during the twelve months following. It occurred after Gordon asked for Helena, and again last night, the moment the General reached his bedroom on his return from the Khedivial Club.

He was better next morning, and then Helena took up the letter from Lord Nuneham. "Read it," said the General, and Helena read —

"DEAR GENERAL, – Gordon is here, and I will send him up to tell you what I think it necessary to do in order to put an end to the riots at Alexandria and make an example of the ringleaders.

"The chief of them is the Arab preacher, Ishmael Ameer, and I propose that we bring him up to Cairo immediately, try him by Special Tribunal, and despatch him without delay to our new penal settlement in the Soudan.

"For that purpose (as the local police are chiefly native and therefore scarcely reliable, and your Colonel on the spot might hesitate to act on his own initiative in the possible event of a rising of the man's Moslem followers), I propose that you send some one from Cairo to take command, and therefore suggest Gordon, your first staff officer, and the most proper person (always excepting yourself) to deal with a situation of such gravity. – Yours in haste, NUNEHAM."

While Helena was reading the letter the General could hardly restrain his excitement.

"Just as I thought!" he said. "I knew the Consul-General would put down that new Mahdi. Wonderful man, Nuneham! And what a chance for Gordon! By Gad, he'll have all Europe talking about him. He deserves it, though. Ask the staff. Ask the officers. Ask the men. I see what Nuneham's aiming at – making Gordon his successor! Well, why not? Why not Gordon Lord the Consul-General? I ask, why not? Good for Egypt and good for England too. Am I wrong?"

Then, remembering to whom he was addressing these imperative challenges, he laughed and said, "Ah, of course! I congratulate you, my child! I'll live to see you proud and happy yet, Helena. Now go – I'm going to get up."

And when Helena warned him that he was over-exciting himself again, he said, "Not a bit of it. I'm all right now. But I must write to Alexandria immediately and see Gordon at once... Coming up this afternoon, you say? That will do. Splendid fellow! Fine as his father! Father and son – both splendid!"

CHAPTER X

When Gordon reached the General's house at five o'clock that day there was for a while a clash of opposing wills. Thinking of Helena's peremptory advice, *Smash the Mahdi*, he was determined to tell her what the Chancellor of El Azhar had said of Ishmael Ameer, and she was resolved that he should say nothing about him. So while Gordon stood by the shaded window, looking down on the city below, which still lay hot under the sun's fierce eye, Helena talked of his mother, her father, and of the Princess Nazimah, who had invited her, in a funny letter, to join the ladies' council for the emancipation of Egyptian women and the abolition of polygamy, saying among other things, "The needle carries but one thread, my dear, and the heart cannot carry two." But at length she said —

"When do you leave for Alexandria?"

"To-night at half-past six. My servant is to take my bag to the railway station, and Hafiz and two other Moslems are to meet me there."

"Good gracious! No time to lose, then. Mosie!" she cried, and a small black boy with large limpid eyes, wearing a scarlet caftan and blue waistband, came into the room.

"Tea, Mosie, quick! Tell the cook the Colonel has to catch a train."

The black boy kissed her hand and went bounding out, whereupon she talked again to prevent Gordon from talking.

"Didn't I tell you that boy was falling in love with me? I found him fighting in the market-place. That was a week ago, since when he has adopted me, and now he is always kissing my hand or the hem of my gown, as who would say, 'I have none but her, and I love her like my eyes.' A most dear little human dog, and I do believe — yes, I really do believe — if I wished it he would go to his death for me."

Gordon, who was gloomy and dejected, and had been drumming on the window-pane without listening, then said —

"Helena, can you imagine what it is to a soldier to feel that he is on the wrong side in battle? If he is to fight well he ought to feel that he is fighting for his country, his flag, and — justice. But when the position is the reverse of that; when, for example —"

But at that moment the General came into the room and welcomed Gordon with a shout.

"Just been writing to Alexandria, telling Jenkinson to keep a force in readiness for you night and day," he said. "Only way, my boy! Force is the one thing the Easterns understand. Of course we don't want bloodshed, but if these rascals are telling the people that the power is not in our hands, or that England will not allow us to use it — we must let them see — we can't help it. Glorious commission, Gordon! I congratulate you! My job, though, and there's only one man I could give it up to — only one man in the world."

And then Gordon, who had been biting his underlip, said, "I almost wish you could do it yourself, General."

"Why, what the deuce —"

"Gordon has been taking counsel with the Chancellor of El Azhar," said Helena, "and the old silly seems to have given him 'the eye' or talked nonsense out of the noble Koran."

"Not nonsense, Helena, and not out of the Koran, but out of the book of life itself," said Gordon, and after the black boy had brought in the tea, he told them what the Chancellor had said.

"So you see," he said, "the preaching of this new prophet has nothing to do with England in Egypt — nothing more, at least, than with England in India, or South Africa, or even Canada itself. It transcends all that, and is teaching for the world, for humanity. Isn't it true, too? Take what he says about the lust of empire, and look at the conduct of the Christian countries. They are praying in their churches 'that it may please Thee to give to all nations unity, peace, and concord,' yet they are increasing their armaments every day. What for — defence? Certainly! But what does that mean? — fear of aggression. So, while in our King's speeches and our President's messages, in our newspapers

and even in our pulpits we keep up the pretence that we are at peace with the world, we are always, according to the devil's code of honour, preparing for the time when two high-spirited nations may find it convenient to fly at each other's throats. Peace with the world! Lies, sir, all lies, and barefaced hypocrisy! The nations never are at peace with the world, never have been, never want to be."

The General tried to protest, but Gordon, who was now excited, said —

"Oh, I know — I'm a soldier too, sir, and I don't want to see my country walked upon. It may be all right, all necessary to the game of empire, but for Heaven's sake let us call it by its right name — conquest, not Christianity — and put away the cant and quackery of being Christian countries."

Again the General tried to protest, but Gordon did not hear.

"Think of it! Kaisers and Kings and Presidents asking God's blessing on their Ministries of War! Bishops and Archbishops praying for more battleships! Christians? Followers of Christ? Why, in the name of God, do they not tear the scales from their eyes and stand revealed to themselves as good, upright, honest, honourable Pagans, bent on the re-paganisation of the world and the destruction of Christian civilisation? I'm a soldier, yes, but I hope to Heaven I'm not a hypocrite, and show me the soldier worth his salt who is not at heart a man of peace."

The General's face was growing scarlet, but Gordon saw nothing of that.

"Then take what this new preacher says about the greed of wealth — isn't that true, too? We pretend to believe that 'it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God,' yet we are nearly all trying, struggling, fighting, scrambling to be rich."

He laughed out loud and then said —

"Look at America — I'm half an American myself, sir, so I've a right to say it — where a man may become a millionaire by crushing out everybody else and appropriating the gifts of nature which God meant for humanity! But America is a Christian country, too, and its richest men build, of their abundance, churches in which to glorify the giving of the widow's mite! Is the man to be silenced who warns the world that such sordid and squalid materialism is swallowing up religion, morality, and truth? Such a man may be the very soul of a country, yet what do we do with him? We hang him or stone him or crucify him — that's what we do with him, sir."

Gordon, who had been walking up and down the room and talking in an intense and poignant voice, stopped suddenly and said —

"General, did you ever reflect upon the way in which Jesus Christ was brought to His death?"

"Good gracious, man, what has that subject to do with this?" said the General.

"A good deal, I think, sir. Did you ever ask yourself who it was that betrayed Jesus?"

"Judas Iscariot, I suppose."

"No, sir, Judas was only the catpaw — scorned through all the ages and burnt in a million effigies, but nearly as innocent of the death of his Master as you or I. The real betrayer was the High Priest of the Jews. He was the head of the bad system which Christ came to wipe out, and he saw that if he did not destroy Jesus, Jesus would destroy him. What did he do? He went to the Governor, the Consul-General of the Roman Occupation, and said, 'This man is setting himself up against Cæsar. If you let him go you are not Cæsar's friend.'"

"Well?"

"That's what the High Priest of Islam is doing in Egypt now. As I was going into the Agency yesterday I met the Grand Cadi coming out. You know what he is, sir — the most fanatical supporter of the old dark ways — slavery, divorce, polygamy, all the refuse of bad Mohammedanism."

"Well, well?"

"Well, my father told me the Grand Cadi had said, 'If you let Ishmael Ameer go on it will be death to the rule of England in Egypt.'"

"And what does it all come to?"

"It comes to this, sir – that if the Chancellor of El Azhar has told me the truth —*if*, I say *if*— when we take Ishmael Ameer and shut him up in prison for life with nothing but a desert around him, we shall be doing something that bears an ugly resemblance to what the Romans did in Palestine."

Then the General, who had not once taken his eyes off Gordon, rose in visible agitation and said —

"Gordon Lord, you astonish me! If what you say means anything it means that this man Ishmael is not only preaching sedition but is justified in doing so. That's what you mean! Am I wrong?"

In his excitement he spoke so rapidly that he stammered, and Helena cried, "Father!"

"Leave me alone, Helena. I'm calm, but when a man talks of ... When you talk of conquest you mean England in Egypt – yes, you do – and you refuse to see that we have to hold high the honour of our country and to protect our dominions in the East."

His voice sounded choked, but he went on —

"More than that, when you compare our Lord's trial and death with that of this – this half-educated Arab out of the desert – this religious Don Quixote who is a menace not only to Government but to the very structure of civilised society – it's shocking, it's blasphemous, and I will not listen to it."

The General was going out in white anger when he stopped at the door and said —

"Gordon Lord, I take leave to think this man an impostor, and if you want my view of how to deal with him and with the credulous simpletons who are turning sedition into crime and crime into bloody anarchy, I give it to you – 'Martial law, sir, and no damned nonsense!'"

Save for one word Helena had not yet spoken, but now with tightly-compressed lips, and such an expression on her face as Gordon had never before seen there, she said —

"I hate that man! I hate him! I hate him!"

Her eyes blazed, and she looked straight into Gordon's face, as she said, "I hate him because you are allowing yourself to be influenced in his favour against your own father, and your own country. An Englishman's duty is to stand by England, whatever she is and whatever she does. And the duty of an English soldier is to fight for her and ask no questions. She is his mother, and to inquire of himself whether she is right or wrong, when her enemies are upon her, is not worthy of a son."

The colour rushed to Gordon's face and he dropped his head.

"As for this man's teaching, it may transcend Egypt but it includes it, and these people will take out of it only what they want, and what they want is an excuse to resist authority and turn their best friends out of the country. As for you," she said, with new force, "your duty is to go to Alexandria and bring this man back to Cairo. It begins and ends there, and has nothing to do with anything else."

Then Gordon raised his head and answered, "You are right, Helena. You are always right. A son is not the judge of his father. And where would England be to-day if her soldiers had always asked themselves whether she was in the right or the wrong? I thought England would be sinning against the light if she sent Ishmael Ameer to the Soudan and so stifled a voice that might be the soul of the East, but I know nothing about him except what his friends have told me... After all, grapes don't grow on pine trees, and the only fruit we see is ... I'll see the man for myself, Helena, and if I find he is encouraging the rioters ... if even in his sermons in the mosques ... Hafiz and the Moslems are to tell me what he says in them... They must tell me the truth, though ... Whatever the consequences ... they must tell me the truth. They shall – my God, they *must*."

CHAPTER XI

The clock struck six, and Gordon rose to go. Helena helped him to belt up the sword he had taken off and to put on his military greatcoat. Then she threw a lace scarf over her head and went out with him into the garden that they might bid good-bye at the gate.

The sun was going down by this time, the odourless air of the desert was cooler and fresher than before, and all nature was full of a soothing and blissful peace.

"Don't go yet; you have a few minutes to spare still. Come," said Helena, and taking his hand she drew him to a blossom-thatched arbour which stood on the edge of the ramparts.

There, with the red glow on their faces, as on the face of the great mosque which stood in conscious grandeur by their side, they looked out in silence for some moments on the glittering city, the gleaming Nile, the yellow desert, and all the glory of the sky.

It was just that mysterious moment between day and night when the earth seems to sing a silent song which only the human heart can hear, and, stirred by an emotion she could scarcely understand, Helena, who had been so brave until now, began to tremble and break down, and the woman in her to appear.

"Don't think me foolish," she said, "but I feel – I feel as if – as if this were the last time you and I were to be together."

"Don't unman me, Helena," said Gordon. "The work I have to do in Alexandria may be dangerous, but don't tell me you are afraid –"

"It isn't that. I shouldn't be fit to be a soldier's daughter or to become – to become a soldier's wife if I were afraid of that. No, I'm not afraid of that, Gordon. I shall never allow myself to be afraid of that. But –"

"But what, Helena?"

"I feel as if something has broken between you and me, and we shall never be the same to each other after to-night. It frightens me. You are so near, yet you seem so far away. Coming out of the house a moment ago, I felt as if I had to take farewell of you, here and now."

Without more ado Gordon took her firmly in his arms, and with one hand on her forehead that he might look full in her face, he said —

"You are not angry with me, Helena – for what I said to your father just now?"

"No, oh no! you were speaking out of your heart, and perhaps it was partly that –"

"You didn't agree with me, I know that quite well, but you love me still, Helena?"

"Don't ask me that, dear."

"I must. I am going away, so speak out, I entreat you. You love me still, Helena?"

"I am here. Isn't that enough?" she said, putting her arms about his neck and laying her head on his breast.

He kissed her, and there was silence for some moments more. Then in a sharp, agitated whisper she said —

"Gordon, that man is coming between us."

"Ishmael Ameer?"

"Yes."

"What utter absurdity, Helena!"

"No, I'm telling you the truth. That man is coming between us. I know it – I feel it – something is speaking to me – warning me. Listen! Last night I saw it in a dream. I cannot remember what happened but he was there, and you and I, and your father and mine, and then –"

"My dear Nell, how foolish! But I see what has happened. When did you receive the Princess Nazimah's letter?"

"Last night – just before going to bed."

"Exactly! And you were brooding over what she said of the needle carrying only one thread?"

"I was thinking of it – yes."

"You were also thinking of what you had said yourself in your letter to me – that if I resisted my father's will the results might be serious for all of us?"

"That too, perhaps."

"There you are, then – there's the stuff of your dream, dear. But don't you see that whatever a man's opinions and sympathies may be, his affections are a different matter altogether – that love is above everything else in a man's life – yes, everything – and that even if this Ishmael Ameer were to divide me from my father or from your father – which God forbid! – he could not possibly separate me from you?"

She looked up into his eyes and said – there was a smile on her lips now – "Could nothing separate you and me?"

"Nothing in this world," he answered.

Her trembling lips fluttered up to his, and again there was a moment of silence. The sun had gone down, the stars had begun to appear, and, under the mellow gold of mingled night and day, the city below, lying in the midst of the desert, looked like a great jewel on the soft bosom of the world.

"You must go now, dear," she whispered.

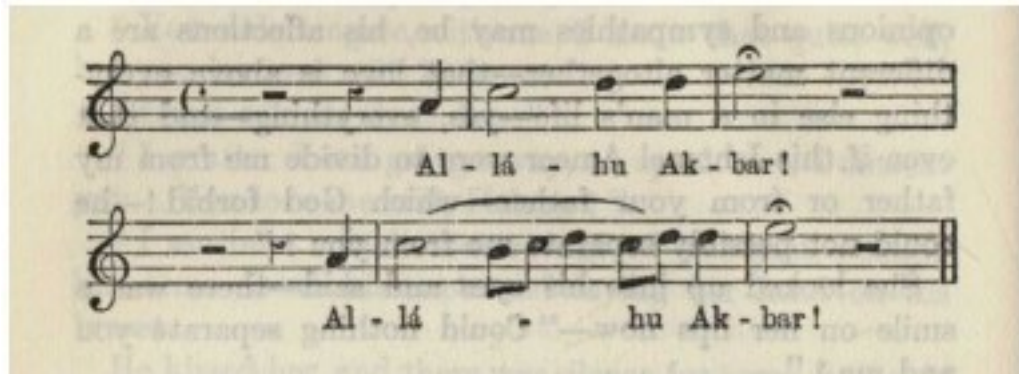
"And you will promise me never to think these ugly thoughts again?"

"'Love is above everything' – I shall only think of that. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" he said, and he embraced her passionately. At the next moment he was gone.

Shadows from the wing of night had gathered over the city by this time, and there came up from the heart of it a surge of indistinguishable voices, some faint and far away, some near and loud, the voices of the muezzins calling from a thousand minarets to evening prayers – and then came another voice from the glistening crest of the great mosque on the ramparts, clear as a clarion and winging its way through the upper air over the darkening mass below —

"God is Most Great! God is Most Great!"



Music fragment

CHAPTER XII

At half-past six Gordon was at the railway-station. He found his soldier servant half-way down the platform, on which blue-shirted porters bustled to and fro, holding open the door of a compartment labelled "Reserved." He found Hafiz also, and with him were two pale-faced Egyptians, in the dress of Sheikhs, who touched their foreheads as Gordon approached.

"These are the men you asked for," said Hafiz.

Gordon shook hands with the Egyptians, and then standing between them, with one firm hand on the shoulder of each and the light of an electric arc lamp in their faces, he said —

"You know what you've got to do, brothers?"

"We know," the men answered.

"The future of Egypt, perhaps of the East, may depend upon what you tell me — you will tell me the truth?"

"We will tell you the truth, Colonel."

"If the man we are going to see should be condemned on your report and on my denunciation you may suffer at the hands of his followers. Protect you as I please, you may be discovered, followed, tracked down — you have no fear of the consequences?"

"We have no fear, sir."

"You are prepared to follow me into any danger?"

"Into any danger."

"To death if need be?"

"To death if need be, brother."

"Step in, then," said Gordon.

At the next moment there was the whistle of the locomotive, and then slowly, rhythmically, with its heavy volcanic throb shaking the platform and rumbling in the glass roof, the train moved out of the station on its way to Alexandria.

CHAPTER XIII

Ishmael Ameer was the son of a Libyan carpenter and boat-builder who, shortly before the days of the Mahdi, had removed with his family to Khartoum. His earliest memory was of the solitary figure of the great white Pasha, on the roof of the palace, looking up the Nile for the relief army that never arrived, and of the same white-headed Englishman, with the pale face, who, walking to and fro on the sands outside the palace garden, patted his head and smiled.

His next memory was of the morning after the fall of the desert city, when, awakened by the melancholy moan of the great ombeya, the elephant-horn that was the trumpet of death, he heard the hellish shrieks of the massacre that was going on in the streets, and saw his mother lying dead in front of the door of the inner closet in which she had hidden him, and found his father's body on the outer threshold.

He was seven years of age at this time, and being adopted by an uncle, a merchant in the town who had been rich enough to buy his own life, he was sent in due course first to the little school of the mosque in Khartoum, and afterwards, at eighteen, to El Azhar in Cairo, where, with other poor students, he slept in the stifling rooms under the flat roof and lived on the hard bread and the jars of cheese and butter which were sent to him from home.

Within four years he had passed the highest examination at the Arabic University, taking the rank of Alim (doctor of Koranic divinity), which entitled him to teach and preach in any quarter of the Mohammedan world, and then, by reason of his rich voice and his devout mind, he was made Reader in the mosque of El Azhar.

Morality was low among the governing classes at that period, and when it occurred that the Grand Cadi, who was a compound of the Eastern voluptuary and the libertine of the Parisian boulevards, marrying for the fourth time, made a feast that went on for a week, in which the days were spent in eating and drinking and the nights in carousing of an unsaintly character, the orgy so shocked the young Alim from the desert that he went down to the great man's house to protest.

"How is this, your Eminence?" he said stoutly. "The Koran teaches temperance, chastity, and contempt of the things of the world, yet you, who are a tower and a light in Islam, have darkened our faces before the infidel."

So daring an outrage on the authority of the Cadi had never been committed before, and Ishmael was promptly flung into the streets, but the matter made some noise, and led in the end to the expulsion of all the Governors (the Ulema) of the University except the one man who, being the first cause of the scandal, was also the representative of the Sultan, and therefore could not be charged.

Meantime Ishmael, returning no more to El Azhar, had settled himself on an island far up the river, and there practising extreme austerities, he gathered a great reputation for holiness, and attracted attention throughout the valley of the Nile by breathing out threatening and slaughter, not so much against the leaders of his own people who were degrading Islam as against the Christians, under whose hated bondage, as he believed, the whole Mohammedan world was going mad.

So wide was the appeal of Ishmael's impeachment and so vast became his following that the Government (now Anglo-Egyptian), always sure that, after sand-storms and sand-flies, holy men of all sorts were the most pernicious products of the Soudan, thought it necessary to put him down, and for this purpose they sent two companies of Arab camel police, promising a reward to the one that should capture the new prophet.

The two camel corps set out on different tracks, but each resolving to take Ishmael by night, they entered his village at the same time from opposite ends, met in the darkness, and fought and destroyed one another, so that when morning dawned they saw their leaders on both sides lying dead in the crimsoning light.

The gruesome incident had the effect of the supernatural on the Arab intellect, and when Ishmael and his followers, with nothing but a stick in one hand and the Koran in the other, came down with a roar of voices and the sand whirling in the wind, the native remnant turned tail and fled before the young prophet's face.

Then the Governor-General, an agnostic with a contempt for "mystic senses" of all kinds, sent a ruckling, swearing, unbelieving company of British infantry, and they took Ishmael without further trouble, brought him up to Khartoum, put him on trial for plotting against the Christian Governor of his province, and imprisoned him in a compound outside the town.

But soon the Government began to see that though they had crushed Ishmael they could not crush Ishmaelism, and they lent an ear to certain of the leaders of his own faith, judges of the Mohammedan law courts, who, having put their heads together, had devised a scheme to wean him from his asceticism, and so destroy the movement by destroying the man. The scheme was an old one, the vales of a woman, and they knew the very woman for the purpose.

This was a girl named Adila, a Copt, only twenty years of age, and by no means a voluptuous creature, but a little winsome thing, very sweet and feminine, always freshly clad, and walking barefoot on the hot sand with an erect confidence that was beautiful to see.

Adila had been the daughter of a Christian merchant at Assouan, and there, six years before, she had been kidnapped by a Bisharin tribe, who, answering her tears with rough comfort, promised to make her a queen.

In their own way they did so, for those being the dark days of Mahdism, they brought her to Omdurman and put her up to auction in the open slave-market, where the black eunuch of the Caliph, after thrusting his yellow fingers into her mouth to examine her teeth, bought her, among other girls, for his master's harem.

There, with forty women of varying ages, gathered by concupiscence from all quarters of the Soudan, she was mewed up in the close atmosphere of two sealed chambers in the Caliph's crudely gorgeous palace, seeing no more of her owner than his coffee-coloured countenance as he passed once a day through the curtained rooms and signalled to one or other of their bedecked and be-ringleted occupants to follow him down a hidden stairway to his private quarters. At such moments of inspection Adila would sit trembling and breathless, in dread of being seen, and she found her companions only too happy to help her to hide herself from the attentions they were seeking for themselves.

This lasted nearly a year, and then came a day when the howling in the streets outside, the wailing of shells overhead, and the crashing of cannon-ball in the dome of the Mahdi's tomb, told the imprisoned women, who were creeping together in corners and clinging to each other in terror, that the English had come at last, and that the Caliph had fallen and fled.

When Adila was set at liberty by the English Sirdar she learned that, in grief at the loss of their daughter, her parents had died, and so, ashamed to return to Assouan, after being a slave girl in Omdurman, she took service with a Greek widow who kept a bakery in Khartoum.

It was there the Sheikhs of the law-courts found her, and they proceeded to coax and flatter her, telling her she had been a good girl who had seen much sorrow, and therefore ought to know some happiness now, to which end they had found a husband to marry her, and he was a fine handsome man, young and learned and rich.

At this Adila, remembering the Caliph, and thinking that such a person as they pictured could only want her as the slave of his bed, turned sharply upon them and said, "When did I ask you to find me a man?" and the Sheikhs had to go back discomfited.

Meanwhile Ishmael, raving against the Christians who were corrupting Mohammedans while he was lying helpless in his prison, fell into a fever, and the Greek mistress of Adila, hearing who had been meant for her handmaiden, and fearing the girl might think too much of herself, began to taunt and mock her.

"They told you he was rich, didn't they?" said the widow. "Well, he has no bread but what the Government gives him, and he is in chains and he is dying, and you would only have had to nurse him and bury him. That's all the husband you would have got, my girl, so perhaps you are better off where you are."

But the widow's taunting went wide, for as soon as Adila had heard her out she went across to the Mohammedan court-house and said —

"Why didn't you tell me it was Ishmael Ameer you meant?"

The Sheikhs answered with a show of shame that they had intended to do so eventually, and if they had not done so at first it was only out of fear of frightening her.

"He's sick and in chains, isn't he?" said Adila.

They admitted that it was true.

"He may never come out of prison alive – isn't that so?"

They could not deny it.

"Then I want to marry him," said Adila.

"What a strange girl you are!" said the Sheikhs, but without more ado the contract was made while Ishmael was so sick that he knew little about it, the marriage document was drawn up in his name, Adila signed it, half her dowry was paid to her, and she promptly gave the money to the poor.

Next day Ishmael was tossing on his angerib in the mud hut which served for his cell when he saw his Soudanese guard come in, followed by four women, and the first of them was Adila, carrying a basket full of cakes such as are made in that country for a marriage festival. One moment she stood over him as he lay on his bed with what seemed to be the dews of death on his forehead, and then putting her basket on the ground she slipped to her knees by his side and said —

"I am Adila. I belong to you now, and have come to take care of you."

"Why do you come to me?" he answered. "Go away. I don't want you."

"But we are married, and I am your wife, and I am here to nurse you until you are well," she said.

"I shall never be well," he replied. "I am dying and will soon be dead. Why should you waste your life on me, my girl? Go away, and God bless you. Praise to His name!"

With that she kissed his hand and her tears fell over it, but after a moment she wiped her eyes, rose to her feet, and turning briskly to the other women she said —

"Take your cakes and be off with you – I'm going to stay."

CHAPTER XIV

Three weeks longer Ishmael lay in the grip of his fever, and day and night Adila tended him, moistening his parched lips and cooling his hot forehead, while he raged against his enemies in his strong delirium, crying, "Down with the Christians! Drive them away! Kill them!" Then the thumping and roaring in his poor brain ceased, and his body was like a boat that had slid in an instant out of a stormy sea into a quiet harbour. Opening his eyes, with his face to the red wall, in the cool light of a breathless morning, he heard behind him the soft and mellow voice of a woman who seemed to be whispering to herself or to Heaven, and she was saying —

"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; for Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory. Amen."

"What is that?" he asked, closing his eyes again, and at the next moment the mellow voice came from somewhere above his face —

"So you are better? Oh, how good that is! I am Adila. Don't you remember me?"

"What was that you were saying, my girl?"

"That? Oh, that was the prayer of the Lord Isa (Jesus)."

"The Lord Isa?"

"Don't you know? Long ago my father told me about Him, and I've not forgotten it even yet. He was only a poor man, a poor Jewish man, a carpenter, but He was so good that He loved all the world, especially sinful women when they were sorry, and little helpless children. He never did harm to His enemies either, but people were cruel and they crucified Him. And now He is in heaven, sitting at God's right hand, with Mary His mother beside Him."

There was silence for a moment, and then —

"Say His prayer again, Adila."

So Adila, with more constraint than before, but still softly and sweetly, began afresh —

"Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven; give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; for Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory. Amen."

Thus the little Coptic woman, in her soft and mellow voice, said her Lord's prayer in that mud hut on the edge of the desert, with only the sick man to hear her, and he was a prisoner and in chains; but long before she had finished, Ishmael's face was hidden in his bed-clothes and he was crying like a child.

There were three weeks more of a painless and dreamy convalescence, in which Adila repeated other stories her father had told her, and Ishmael saw Christianity for the first time as it used to be, and wondered to find it a faith so sweet and so true, and above all, save for the character of Jesus, so like his own.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.