HENTY GEORGE ALFRED

WITH KITCHENER IN THE SOUDAN: A STORY OF ATBARA AND OMDURMAN

George Henty

With Kitchener in the Soudan: A Story of Atbara and Omdurman

Henty G.

With Kitchener in the Soudan: A Story of Atbara and Omdurman / G. Henty — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

G. A. Henty
With Kitchener in the Soudan: A Story of Atbara and Omdurman

Preface

The reconquest of the Soudan will ever be mentioned as one of the most difficult, and at the same time the most successful, enterprises ever undertaken. The task of carrying an army hundreds of miles across a waterless desert; conveying it up a great river, bristling with obstacles; defeating an enormously superior force, unsurpassed in the world for courage; and, finally, killing the leader of the enemy and crushing out the last spark of opposition; was a stupendous one.

After the death of Gordon, and the retirement of the British troops, there was no force in existence that could have barred the advance of the fanatical hordes of the Mahdi, had they poured down into Egypt. The native Egyptian army was, as yet, in the earliest stage of organization; and could not be relied upon to stand firm against the wild rush of the Dervishes. Fortunately, time was given for that organization to be completed; and when, at last, the Dervish forces marched north, they were repulsed. Assouan was saved, and Wady Halfa became the Egyptian outpost.

Gradually, preparations were made for taking the offensive. A railway was constructed along the banks of the Nile, and a mixed force of British and Egyptians drove the enemy beyond Dongola; then, by splendidly organized labour, a railroad was made from Wady Halfa, across the desert, towards the elbow of the great bend from Dongola to Abu Hamed. The latter place was captured, by an Egyptian brigade moving up from the former place; and from that moment, the movement was carried on with irresistible energy.

The railway was pushed forward to Abu Hamed; and then southward, past Berber, up to the Atbara river. An army of twenty thousand men, under one of the Khalifa's sons, was attacked in a strong position and defeated with immense loss. Fresh British troops were then brought up; and, escorted by gunboats and steamers carrying provisions, the army marched up the Nile, crushed the Khalifa's great host before Omdurman, and recovered possession of Khartoum.

Then, the moving spirit of this enterprise, the man whose marvellous power of organization had secured its success, was called to other work. Fortunately, he had a worthy successor in Colonel Wingate; who, with a native force, encountered that which the Khalifa had again gathered, near El Obeid, the scene of the total destruction of the army under Hicks Pasha; routed it with ease, killing the Khalifa and all his principal emirs. Thus a land that had been turned into a desert, by the terrible tyranny of the Mahdi and his successor, was wrested from barbarism and restored to civilization; and the stain upon British honour, caused by the desertion of Gordon by the British ministry of the day, was wiped out.

It was a marvellous campaign–marvellous in the perfection of its organization, marvellous in the completeness of its success.

G. A. Henty.

Chapter 1: Disinherited

"Wanted, an active and intelligent young man, for general work, in a commercial house having a branch at Alexandria. It is desirable that he should be able to write a good hand; and, if necessary, to assist in office work. Wages, 2 pounds per week. Personal application to be made at Messieurs Partridge and Company, 453 Leadenhall Street."

This advertisement was read by a man of five or six and twenty, in a small room in the upper story of a house in Lupus Street, Pimlico. He was not the only inmate of the room, for a young woman, apparently not more than eighteen, was sitting there sewing; her work interrupted, occasionally, by a short, hacking cough. Her husband, for this was the relation in which he stood to her, put down the paper carelessly, and then got up.

"I am going out, dear, on my usual search. You know, we have agreed that it is of no use my trying to live by my pen. I get an article accepted, occasionally, but it's not enough to provide more than bread and cheese. I must look for something else."

"But you must succeed, presently, Gregory."

"Yes, dear; but while the grass grows, the horse starves. At any rate, I will try for something else. If I get anything, it won't prevent my writing; and when my genius is recognized, I can drop the other thing, and take to literature regularly, again.

"Well, I won't be away longer than I can help. Anyhow, I will be back to our midday banquet. I will bring a couple of rashers of bacon in with me. We have potatoes enough, I think."

So saying, he kissed his wife tenderly, and went out.

Gregory Hartley belonged to a good family. He was the second son of the Honorable James Hartley, brother of the Marquis of Langdale. He had been educated at Harrow and Cambridge; and, after leaving the university, had gone out to Egypt with a friend of his father's, who was an enthusiast in the exploration of the antiquities of that country. Gregory had originally intended to stay there a few months, at most, but he was infected by the enthusiasm of his companion, and remained in Egypt for two years; when the professor was taken ill and died, and he returned home.

A year later, he fell in love with the governess in a neighbouring family. His feeling was reciprocated, and they became engaged. His father was furious, when his son told him what had taken place.

"It is monstrous," he said, "after the education that you have had, and the place that I, if I survive him; or, if not, your brother, will take at the death of your uncle; that you should dream of throwing yourself away, in this manner. I have looked to your making a good marriage; for, as you know, I am not what may be called a rich man. Your brother's tastes are expensive; and what with his education, and yours, and the allowances I have made you both, it is as much as I have been able to do to keep up our position. And there are your sisters to be provided for. The idea of your falling in love with this young woman is monstrous."

"Young lady, Father. She is a clergyman's daughter."

"I won't hear of such a thing–I will not hear of it for a moment; and if you persist in this mad folly, I tell you, fairly, that from this moment I shall have nothing more to say to you! You have to choose between me, and this penniless beggar."

"I am sorry you put it in that way, sir. My choice is made. I am engaged to this young lady, and shall certainly marry her. I trust that, when your present anger has subsided, you will recognize that my honour was involved in the matter; and that even if I wished it, I could not, without showing myself to be a downright cad, draw back."

And so, Gregory Hartley married the girl of his choice. She had, for some time, refused to allow him to sacrifice himself; but when she found that he was as determined as his father, and absolutely

refused to release her from the engagement, she had given way; and had, after a quiet marriage, accompanied him to London.

There he had endeavoured to get literary work, but had found it much harder than he had expected. The market was overcrowded, and they had moved from comfortable lodgings into small rooms; and so, step by step, had come to the attic in Lupus Street. He was doing a little better now, and had hopes that, ere long, he would begin to make his way steadily up.

But the anxiety had told on his wife. Never very strong, she had developed a short, hard cough; and he had drawn upon his scanty reserves, to consult a specialist.

"There is undoubtedly lung trouble," the latter said. "If you can manage it, I should say that she ought certainly to be taken to a warm climate. The damage is not extensive, as yet; and it is probable that, under favourable circumstances, she might shake it off; but I fear that, if she continues to live in London, her chances are not great."

This, Gregory felt, was almost equivalent to a death sentence; and he had begun to consult the advertisements in the papers, for some post abroad. He had, unknown to her, applied for several situations, but without success.

When he first read the advertisement that morning, he had hardly thought of applying for the situation. His pride revolted at the idea of becoming a mere messenger; but his wife's cough had decided him. What did it matter, so that he could save her life?

"I may not get it," he said to himself, as he went out; "but my knowledge of Arabic, and the native dialect, is all in my favour. And at least, in a year or two, she may have thoroughly shaken off the cough, and that is everything.

"At any rate, I have a better chance of getting this than I had of the other places that I applied for. There can hardly be a rush of applicants. When I am out there, I may hear of something better.

"However, I will take another name. Fortunately I have a second one, which will do very well. Hilliard will do as well as Hartley; and as I never write it in full as my signature, no one would recognize it as my name. There is nothing to be ashamed of, in accepting such a post.

"As for the marquis, as he has never been friendly with us, it does not matter. He is, I have heard, a very tough sort of man; and my father is not likely to survive him. But I do not think it would be fair to Geoffrey, when he comes into his peerage, that anyone should be able to say that he has a brother who is porter, in a mercantile house at Alexandria. We have never got on very well together. The fact that he was heir to a title spoilt him. I think he would have been a very good fellow, if it hadn't been for that."

On arriving at the office in Leadenhall Street, he was, on saying he wished to speak to Mr. Partridge, at once shown in. A good many of his personal belongings had been long since pledged; but he had retained one or two suits, so that he could make as good an appearance as possible, when he went out. The clerk had merely said, "A gentleman wishes to speak to you, sir," and the merchant looked up enquiringly at him, as he entered.

"I have come to see you, sir, with reference to that advertisement, for a man at your establishment at Alexandria."

A look of surprise came over the merchant's face, and he said:

"Have you called on your own account?"

"Yes; I am anxious to go abroad, for the sake of my wife's health, and I am not particular as to what I do, so that I can take her to a warm climate. I may say that I have been two years in Egypt, and speak Arabic and Koptic fluently. I am strong and active, and am ready to make myself useful, in any way."

Mr. Partridge did not answer, for a minute. Certainly this applicant was not at all the sort of man he had expected to apply for the place, in answer to his advertisement. That he was evidently a gentleman was far from an advantage, but the fact that he could speak the languages would add much to his value.

"Can you give me references?" he said, at last.

"I cannot, sir. I should not like to apply to any of my friends, in such a matter. I must ask you to take me on trust. Frankly, I have quarrelled with my family, and have to strike out for myself. Were it not for my wife's health, I could earn my living; but I am told it is essential that she should go to a warm climate, and as I see no other way of accomplishing this, I have applied for this situation, hoping that my knowledge of the language, and my readiness to perform whatever duties I may be required to do, might induce you to give me a trial."

"And you would, if necessary–say, in the case of illness of one of my clerks–be ready to help in the office?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Will you call again, in half an hour? I will give you an answer, then."

By the time Gregory returned, the merchant's mind was made up. He had come to the conclusion that the story he had heard was a true one. The way it had been told was convincing. The man was undoubtedly a gentleman. There was no mistake in his manner and talk. He had quarrelled with his family, probably over his marriage; and, as so many had done, found it difficult to keep his head above water. His wife had been ordered to a warm climate, and he was ready to do anything that would enable him to keep her there.

It would assuredly be a great advantage to have one who could act, in an emergency, as a clerk; of course, his knowledge of language would greatly add to his utility. It certainly was not business to take a man without a reference, but the advantages more than counterbalanced the disadvantages. It was not likely that he would stay with him long; but at any rate, the fact that he was taking his wife with him would ensure his staying, until he saw something a great deal better elsewhere.

When Gregory returned, therefore, he said:

"I have been thinking this matter over. What is your name?"

"Gregory Hilliard, sir."

"Well, I have been thinking it over, and I have decided to engage you. I quite believe the story that you have told me, and your appearance fully carries it out. You may consider the matter settled. I am willing to pay for a second-class passage for your wife, as well as yourself; and will give such instructions, to my agents there, as will render your position as easy for you as possible. In the natural course of things, your duties would have included the sweeping out of the offices, and work of that description; but I will instruct him to engage a native to do this, under your supervision. You will be in charge of the warehouse, under the chief storekeeper; and, as you say, you will, in case of pressure of work in the office, take a desk there.

"In consideration of your knowledge of the language, which will render you, at once, more useful than a green hand would be, I shall add ten shillings a week to the wages named in the advertisement, which will enable you to obtain comfortable lodgings."

"I am heartily obliged to you, sir," Gregory said, "and will do my best to show that your confidence in me has not been misplaced. When do you wish me to sail? I shall only require a few hours to make my preparations."

"Then in that case I will take a passage, for you and your wife, in the P. and O. that sails, next Thursday, from Southampton. I may say that it is our custom to allow fifteen pounds, for outfit. If you will call again in half an hour, I will hand you the ticket and a cheque for that amount; and you can call, the day before you go, for a letter to our agents there."

Gregory ascended the stairs to his lodging with a far more elastic step than usual. His wife saw at once, as he entered, that he had good news of some sort.

"What is it, Gregory?"

"Thank God, darling, that I have good news to give you, at last! I have obtained a situation, at about a hundred and thirty pounds a year, in Alexandria."

"Alexandria?" she repeated, in surprise.

"Yes. It is the place of all others that I wanted to go to. You see, I understand the language. That is one thing; and what is of infinitely more consequence, it is a place that will suit your health; and you will, I hope, very soon get rid of that nasty cough. I did not tell you at the time, but the doctor I took you to said that this London air did not suit you, but that a warm climate would soon set you up again."

"You are going out there for my sake, Gregory! As if I hadn't brought trouble enough on you, already!"

"I would bear a good deal more trouble for your sake, dear. You need not worry about that."

"And what are you going to do?" she asked.

"I am going to be a sort of useful man–extra clerk, assistant storekeeper, et cetera, et cetera. I like Egypt very much. It will suit me to a T. At any rate, it will be a vast improvement upon this.

"Talking of that, I have forgotten the rashers. I will go and get them, at once. We sha'n't have to depend upon them as our main staple, in future; for fruit is dirt cheap, out there, and one does not want much meat. We shall be able to live like princes, on two pounds ten a week; and besides, this appointment may lead to something better, and we may consider that there is a future before us.

"We are to sail on Thursday. Look! Here are fifteen golden sovereigns. That is for my outfit, and we can begin with luxuries, at once. We shall not want much outfit: half a dozen suits of white drill for myself, and some gowns for you."

"Nonsense, Gregory! I sha'n't want anything. You would not let me sell any of my dresses, and I have half a dozen light ones. I shall not want a penny spent on me."

"Very well; then I will begin to be extravagant, at once. In the first place, I will go down to that confectioner's, round the corner; and we will celebrate my appointment with a cold chicken, and a bottle of port. I shall be back in five minutes."

"Will it be very hot, Gregory?" she asked, as they ate their meal. "Not that I am afraid of heat, you know. I always like summer."

"No. At any rate, not at present. We are going out at the best time of the year, and it will be a comfort, indeed, to change these November fogs for the sunshine of Egypt. You will have four or five months to get strong again, before it begins to be hot. Even in summer, there are cool breezes morning and evening; and of course, no one thinks of going out in the middle of the day. I feel as happy as a schoolboy, at the thought of getting out of this den and this miserable climate, and of basking in the sunshine. We have had a bad beginning, dear, but we have better days before us."

"Thank God, Gregory! I have not cared about myself. But it has been a trial, when your manuscripts have come back, to see you sitting here slaving away; and to know that it is I who have brought you to this."

"I brought myself to it, you obstinate girl! I have pleased myself, haven't I? If a man chooses a path for himself, he must not grumble because he finds it rather rougher than he expected. I have never, for a single moment, regretted what I have done; at any rate, as far as I, myself, am concerned."

"Nor I, for my own sake, dear. The life of a governess is not so cheerful as to cause one regret, at leaving it."

And so, Gregory Hartley and his wife went out to Alexandria, and established themselves in three bright rooms, in the upper part of a house that commanded a view of the port, and the sea beyond it. The outlay required for furniture was small, indeed: some matting for the floors, a few cushions for the divans which ran round the rooms, a bed, a few simple cooking utensils, and a small stock of crockery sufficed.

Mr. Ferguson, the manager of the branch, had at first read the letter that Gregory had brought him with some doubt in his mind, as to the wisdom of his principal, in sending out a man who was evidently a gentleman. This feeling, however, soon wore away; and he found him perfectly ready to undertake any work to which he was set.

There was, indeed, nothing absolutely unpleasant about this. He was at the office early, and saw that the native swept and dusted the offices. The rest of the day he was either in the warehouse,

or carried messages, and generally did such odd jobs as were required. A fortnight after his arrival, one of the clerks was kept away by a sharp attack of fever; and as work was pressing, the agent asked Gregory to take his place.

"I will do my best, sir, but I know nothing of mercantile accounts."

"The work will be in no way difficult. Mr. Hardman will take Mr. Parrot's ledgers; and, as you will only have to copy the storekeeper's issues into the books, five minutes will show you the form in which they are entered."

Gregory gave such satisfaction that he was afterwards employed at office work, whenever there was any pressure.

A year and a half passed comfortably. At the end of twelve months, his pay was raised another ten shillings a week.

He had, before leaving England, signed a contract to remain with the firm for two years. He regretted having to do this, as it prevented his accepting any better position, should an opening occur; but he recognized that the condition was a fair one, after the firm paying for his outfit and for two passages. At the end of eighteen months, Gregory began to look about for something better.

"I don't mind my work a bit," he said to his wife, "but, if only for the sake of the boy" (a son had been born, a few months after their arrival), "I must try to raise myself in the scale, a bit. I have nothing to complain about at the office; far from it. From what the manager said to me the other day, if a vacancy occurred in the office, I should have the offer of the berth. Of course, it would be a step; for I know, from the books, that Hardman gets two hundred a year, which is forty more than I do."

"I should like you to get something else, Gregory. It troubles me, to think that half your time is spent packing up goods in the warehouse, and work of that sort; and even if we got less I would much rather, even if we had to stint ourselves, that your work was more suitable to your past; and such that you could associate again with gentlemen, on even terms."

"That does not trouble me, dear, except that I wish you had some society among ladies. However, both for your sake and the boy's, and I own I should like it myself, I will certainly keep on the lookout for some better position. I have often regretted, now, that I did not go in for a commission in the army. I did want to, but my father would not hear of it. By this time, with luck, I might have got my company; and though the pay would not have been more than I get here, it would, with quarters and so on, have been as much, and we should be in a very different social position.

"However, it is of no use talking about that now; and indeed, it is difficult to make plans at all. Things are in such an unsettled condition, here, that there is no saying what will happen.

"You see, Arabi and the military party are practically masters here. Tewfik has been obliged to make concession after concession to them, to dismiss ministers at their orders, and to submit to a series of humiliations. At any moment, Arabi could dethrone him, as he has the whole army at his back, and certainly the larger portion of the population. The revolution could be completed without trouble or bloodshed; but you see, it is complicated by the fact that Tewfik has the support of the English and French governments; and there can be little doubt that the populace regard the movement as a national one, and directed as much against foreign control and interference as against Tewfik, against whom they have no ground of complaint, whatever. On the part of the army and its generals, the trouble has arisen solely on account of the favouritism shown to Circassian officers.

"But once a revolution has commenced, it is certain to widen out. The peasantry are, everywhere, fanatically hostile to foreigners. Attacks have been made upon these in various country districts; and, should Arabi be triumphant, the position of Christians will become very precarious. Matters are evidently seen in that light in England; for I heard today, at the office, that the British and French squadrons are expected here, in a day or two.

"If there should be a row, our position here will be very unpleasant. But I should hardly think that Arabi would venture to try his strength against that of the fleets, and I fancy that trouble will, in the first place, begin in Cairo; both as being the capital of the country, and beyond the reach of armed

interference by the Powers. Arabi's natural course would be to consolidate his power throughout the whole of Egypt, leaving Alexandria severely alone, until he had obtained absolute authority elsewhere.

"Anyhow, it will be a satisfaction to have the fleet up; as, at the first rumour of an outbreak, I can get you and baby on board one of the ships lying in harbour. As a simple measure of precaution, I would suggest that you should go out with me, this evening, and buy one of the costumes worn by the native women. It is only a long blue robe, enveloping you from head to foot; and one of those hideous white cotton veils, falling from below the eyes. I will get a bottle of iodine, and you will then only have to darken your forehead and eyelids, and you could pass, unsuspected, through any crowd."

"But what are you going to do, Gregory?"

"I will get a native dress, too; but you must remember that though, if possible, I will come to you, I may not be able to do so; and in case you hear of any tumult going on, you must take Baby, and go down at once to the port. You know enough of the language, now, to be able to tell a boatman to take you off to one of the steamers in the port. As soon as I get away I shall go round the port, and shall find you without difficulty. Still, I do not anticipate any trouble arising without our having sufficient warning to allow me to come and see you settled on board ship; and I can then keep on in the office until it closes, when I can join you again.

"Of course, all this is very remote, and I trust that the occasion will never arise. Still, there is no doubt that the situation is critical, and there is no harm in making our preparations for the worst.

"At any rate, dear, I beg that you will not go out alone, till matters have settled down. We will do the shopping together, when I come back from the office.

"There is one thing that I have reason to be grateful for. Even if the worst comes to the worst, and all Christians have to leave the country, the object for which I came out here has been attained. I have not heard you cough, for months; we have laid by fifty pounds; and I have written some forty stories, long and short, and if we go back I have a fair hope of making my way, for I am sure that I write better than I used to do; and as a good many of the stories are laid in Egypt, the local colouring will give them a distinctive character, and they are more likely to be accepted than those I wrote before. Editors of magazines like a succession of tales of that kind.

"For the present, there is no doubt that the arrival of the fleet will render our position here more comfortable than it is, at present. The mere mob of the town would hesitate to attack Europeans, when they know that three or four thousand sailors could land in half an hour. But on the other hand, Arabi and his generals might see that Alexandria was, after all, the most important position, and that it was here foreign interference must be arrested.

"I should not be surprised if, on the arrival of the ships, Tewfik, Arabi, and all the leaders of the movement come here at once. Tewfik will come to get the support of the fleet. Arabi will come to oppose a landing of troops. The war in the beginning of the century was decided at Alexandria, and it may be so, again. If I were sure that you would come to no harm, and I think the chances of that are very small, I own that all this would be immensely interesting, and a break to the monotony of one's life here.

"One thing is fairly certain. If there is anything like a regular row, all commercial work will come to an end until matters are settled; in which case, even if the offices are not altogether closed, and the whole staff recalled to England, they would be glad enough to allow me to leave, instead of keeping me to the two years' agreement that I signed, before starting."

"I should hardly think that there would be a tumult here, Gregory. The natives all seem very gentle and peaceable, and the army is composed of the same sort of men."

"They have been kept down for centuries, Annie; but there is a deep, fanatical feeling in every Mussulman's nature; and, at any rate, the great proportion of the officers of the army are Mussulmans. As for the Kopts, there would be no danger of trouble from them; but the cry of 'death to the Christians' would excite every Mahomedan in the land, almost to madness.

"Unfortunately, too, there is a general belief, whether truly founded or not, that although the French representative here is apparently acting in concert with ours, he and all the French officials are secretly encouraging Arabi, and will take no active steps, whatever. In that case, it is doubtful whether England would act alone. The jealousy between the two peoples here is intense. For years, the French have been thwarting us at every turn; and they may very well think that, however matters might finally go, our interference would make us so unpopular, in Egypt, that their influence would become completely paramount.

"Supremacy in Egypt has always been the dream of the French. Had it not been for our command of the sea, they would have obtained possession of the country in Napoleon's time. Their intrigues here have, for years, been incessant. Their newspapers in Egypt have continually maligned us, and they believe that the time has come when they will be the real, if not the nominal, rulers of Egypt. The making of the Suez Canal was quite as much a political as a commercial move, and it has certainly added largely to their influence here; though, in this respect, a check was given to them by the purchase of the Khedive's shares in the canal by Lord Beaconsfield; a stroke which, however, greatly increased the enmity of the French here, and heightened their efforts to excite the animosity of the people against us.

"Well, I hope that whatever comes of all this, the question as to whose influence is to be paramount in Egypt will be finally settled. Even French domination would be better than the constant intrigues and trouble, that keep the land in a state of agitation. However, I fancy that it will be the other way, if an English fleet comes here and there is trouble. I don't think we shall back down; and if we begin in earnest, we are sure to win in the long run. France must see that, and if she refuses to act, at the last moment, it can only be because Arabi has it in his power to produce documents showing that he was, all along, acting in accordance with her secret advice."

A week later, on the 20th of May, the squadrons of England and France anchored off Alexandria. The British fleet consisted of eight ironclads and five gunboats, carrying three thousand five hundred and thirty-nine men and one hundred and two guns, commanded by Sir Frederick Seymour. Two days before the approach of the fleet was known at Cairo, the French and English consuls proposed that the Khedive should issue a decree, declaring a general amnesty, and that the president of the council, the minister of war, and the three military pashas should quit the country for a year. This request was complied with.

The ministry resigned, in a body, on the day the fleet arrived; on the ground that the Khedive acquiesced in foreign interference. A great meeting was held of the chief personages of state, and the officers and the representatives of the army at once told the Khedive that they refused to obey his orders, and only recognized the authority of the Porte.

At Alexandria all trade ceased at once, when it became known that the troops were busy strengthening the forts, mounting cannon, and preparing for a resistance. That this was done by the orders of Arabi, who was now practically dictator, there could be no question. The native population became more and more excited, being firmly of belief that no vessels could resist the fire of the heavy guns; and that any attempt on the part of the men-of-war to reduce the place would end in their being sunk, as soon as fighting began.

The office and stores were still kept open, but Gregory's duties were almost nominal; and he and Mr. Parrot, who was also married, were told by the manager that they could spend the greater portion of their time at their homes. Part of Gregory's duties consisted in going off to vessels that came into the port with goods for the firm, and seeing to their being brought on shore; and he had no difficulty in making arrangements, with the captain of one of these ships, for his wife and child to go on board at once, should there be any trouble in the town.

"If you hear any sounds of tumult, Annie, you must disguise yourself at once, and go down to the wharf. I have arranged with our boatman, Allen, whom you know well, as we have often gone out with him for a sail in the evening, that if he hears of an outbreak, he shall bring the boat to the

steps at the end of this street, and take you off to the Simoon. Of course, I shall come if I can, but our house is one of those which have been marked off as being most suitable for defence. The men from half a dozen other establishments are to gather there and, as belonging to the house, I must aid in the defence. Of course, if I get sufficient warning, I shall slip on my disguise, and hurry here, and see you down to the boat; and then make my way back to our place. But do not wait for me. If I come here and find that you have gone, I shall know that you have taken the alarm in time, and shall return at once to the office.

"Of course, if the outbreak commences near here, and you find that your way down to the water is blocked, you will simply put on your disguise, stain your face, and wait till I come to you, or till you see that the way to the water is clear. Do not attempt to go out into a mob. There are not likely to be any women among them. However, I do not anticipate a serious riot. They may attack Europeans in the street, but with some fourteen or fifteen men-of-war in the port, they are not likely to make any organized assault. Arabi's agents will hardly precipitate matters in that way. Hard as they may work, it will take a month to get the defences into proper order, and any rising will be merely a spasmodic outbreak of fanaticism. I don't think the danger is likely to be pressing until, finding that all remonstrances are vain, the admiral begins to bombard the port."

"I will do exactly as you tell me, Gregory. If I were alone, I could not bring myself to leave without you, but I must think of the child."

"Quite so, dear. That is the first consideration. Certainly, if it comes to a fight, I should be much more comfortable with the knowledge that you and Baby were in safety."

The Egyptian soldiers were quartered, for the most part, outside the town; and for some days there was danger that they would enter, and attack the European inhabitants; but Arabi's orders were strict that, until he gave the command, they were to remain quiet.

The British admiral sent messages to Tewfik, insisting that the work upon the fortifications should cease, and the latter again issued orders to that effect, but these were wholly disobeyed. He had, indeed, no shadow of authority remaining; and the work continued, night and day. It was, however, as much as possible concealed from observation; but, search lights being suddenly turned upon the forts, at night, showed them to be swarming with men.

Things went on with comparative quiet till the 10th of June, although the attitude of the natives was so threatening that no Europeans left their houses, except on urgent business. On that day, a sudden uproar was heard. Pistols were fired, and the merchants closed their stores and barricaded their doors.

Gregory was in the harbour at the time and, jumping into his boat, rowed to the stairs and hurried home. He found that his wife had already disguised herself, and was in readiness to leave.

The street was full of excited people. He slipped on his own disguise, darkened his face, and then, seizing a moment when the crowd had rushed up the street at the sound of firearms at the other end, hurried down to the boat, and rowed off to the Simoon.

"I must return now, dear," he said. "I can get in at the back gate–I have the key, as the stores are brought in through that way. I do not think that you need feel any uneasiness. The row is evidently still going on, but only a few guns are being fired now. Certainly the rascals cannot be attacking the stores, or you would hear a steady musketry fire. By the sound, the riot is principally in the foreign quarter, where the Maltese, Greeks, and Italians congregate. No doubt the police will soon put it down."

The police, however, made no attempt to do so, and permitted the work of massacre to take place under their eyes. Nearly two hundred Europeans were killed. The majority of these dwelt in the foreign quarter, but several merchants and others were set upon, while making their way to their offices, and some seamen from the fleet were also among the victims. The British consul was dragged out of his carriage, and severely injured. The consulate was attacked, and several Frenchmen were killed in the streets.

The Khedive hurried from Cairo, on hearing the news. Arabi was now sending some of his best regiments to Alexandria, while pretending to be preparing for a raid upon the Suez Canal. He was receiving the assistance of Dervish Pasha, the Sultan's representative; and had been recognized by the Sultan, who conferred upon him the highest order of Medjidie.

In the meantime a conference had been held by the Powers, and it was decided that the Sultan should be entrusted with the work of putting down the insurrection, he being nominally lord paramount of Egypt. But conditions were laid down, as to his army leaving the country afterwards.

The Sultan sent an evasive reply. The Khedive was too overwhelmed at the situation to take any decisive course. France hesitated, and England determined that, with or without allies, she would take the matter in hand.

Chapter 2: The Rising In Alexandria

The harbour was full of merchant ships, as there were, at present, no means of getting their cargoes unloaded. The native boatmen had, for the most part, struck work; and had they been willing to man their boats, they must have remained idle as, in view of the situation, the merchants felt that their goods were much safer on board ship than they would be in their magazines. It was settled, therefore that, for the present, Annie and the child should remain on board the Simoon, while Gregory should take up his residence at the office.

The fleet in the harbour was now an imposing one. Not only were the English and French squadrons there, but some Italian ships of war had arrived, and a United States cruiser; and on the 7th of July, Sir Beauchamp Seymour sent in a decisive message, that he should commence a bombardment of the fort unless the strengthening of the fortifications was, at once, abandoned. No heed was taken of the intimation and, three days later, he sent an ultimatum demanding the cessation of work, and the immediate surrender of the forts nearest to the entrance to the harbour; stating that, if these terms were not complied with in twenty-four hours, the bombardment would commence.

Already the greater part of the European inhabitants had left the town, and taken up their quarters in the merchant ships that had been engaged for the purpose. A few, however, of the bankers and merchants determined to remain. These gathered in the bank, and in Mr. Ferguson's house, to which the most valuable goods in other establishments were removed. They had an ample supply of firearms, and believed that they could hold out for a considerable time. They were convinced that the Egyptian troops would not, for an hour, resist the fire that would be opened upon them, but would speedily evacuate the town; and that, therefore, there would only be the mob to be encountered, and this but for a short time, as the sailors would land as soon as the Egyptian troops fled.

The Egyptians, on the other hand, believed absolutely in their ability to destroy the fleet.

Both parties were wrong. The Europeans greatly undervalued the fighting powers of the Egyptians, animated as they were by confidence in the strength of the defences, by their number, and by their fanaticism; while the Egyptians similarly undervalued the tremendous power of our ships.

That evening, and the next morning, the port presented an animated appearance. Boats were putting off with those inhabitants who had waited on, hoping that the Egyptians would at the last moment give in. Many of the merchantmen had already cleared out. Others were getting up sail. Smoke was rising from the funnels of all the men of war.

An express boat had brought, from France, orders that the French fleet were to take no part in the proceedings, but were to proceed at once to Port Said. This order excited the bitterest feeling of anger and humiliation among the French officers and sailors, who had relied confidently in taking their part in the bombardment; and silently their ships, one by one, left the port. The Italian and American vessels remained for a time; and as the British ships followed, in stately order, their crews manned the rigging and vociferously cheered our sailors, who replied as heartily.

All, save the British men of war, took up their stations well out at sea, in a direction where they would be out of the fire of the Egyptian batteries. It was not until nine o'clock in the evening that the two last British ships, the Invincible and Monarch, steamed out of port. At half-past four in the morning the ships got under weigh again, and moved to the positions marked out for them.

Fort Mex, and the batteries on the sand hills were faced by the Penelope, the Monarch, and the Invincible; the Alexandra, the Superb, and the Sultan faced the harbour forts, Ada, Pharos, and Ras-el-Teen; the Temeraire and Inflexible prepared to aid the Invincible in her attack on Fort Mex, or to support the three battleships engaged off the port, as might be required; and the five gunboats moved away towards Fort Marabout, which lay some distance to the west of the town.

At seven o'clock, the Alexandra began the engagement by firing a single gun. Then the whole fleet opened fire, the Egyptian artillerymen replying with great steadiness and resolution. There was

scarcely a breath of wind, and the ships were, in a few instants, shrouded in their own smoke; and were frequently obliged to cease firing until this drifted slowly away, to enable them to aim their guns. The rattle of the machine guns added to the din. Midshipmen were sent aloft, and these signalled down to the deck the result of each shot, so that the gunners were enabled to direct their fire, even when they could not see ten yards beyond the muzzle of the guns.

In a short time, the forts and batteries showed how terrible was the effect of the great shells. The embrasures were torn and widened, there were great gaps in the masonry of the buildings, and the hail of missiles from the machine guns swept every spot near the Egyptian guns; and yet, Arabi's soldiers did not flinch but, in spite of the number that fell, worked their guns as fast as ever.

Had they been accustomed to the huge Krupp guns in their batteries, the combat would have been more equal; and although the end would have been the same, the ships must have suffered terribly. Fortunately, the Egyptian artillerymen had little experience in the working of these heavy pieces, and their shot in almost every case flew high–sometimes above the masts, sometimes between them, but in only a few instances striking the hull. With their smaller guns they made good practice, but though the shot from these pieces frequently struck, they dropped harmlessly from the iron sides, and only those that entered through the portholes effected any damage.

The Condor, under Lord Charles Beresford, was the first to engage Fort Marabout; and, for a time, the little gunboat was the mark of all the guns of the fort. But the other four gunboats speedily came to her assistance, and effectually diverted the fire of the fort from the ships that were engaging Fort Mex.

At eight o'clock the Monarch, having silenced the fort opposite to her, and dismounted the guns, joined the Inflexible and Penelope in their duel with Fort Mex; and by nine o'clock all the guns were silenced except four, two of which were heavy rifled guns, well sheltered. In spite of the heavy fire from the three great ships, the Egyptian soldiers maintained their fire, the officers frequently exposing themselves to the bullets of the machine guns by leaping upon the parapet, to ascertain the effect of their own shot.

The harbour forts were, by this time, crumbling under the shot of four warships opposed to them. The Pharos suffered most heavily, and its guns were absolutely silenced; while the fire from the other two forts slackened, considerably. At half-past ten, it was seen that the Ras-el-Teen Palace, which lay behind the fort, was on fire; and, half an hour later, the fire from that fort and Fort Ada almost died out.

The British Admiral now gave the signal to cease firing, and as the smoke cleared away, the effects of the five hours' bombardment were visible. The forts and batteries were mere heaps of ruins. The guns could be made out, lying dismounted, or standing with their muzzles pointing upwards.

The ships had not come out scatheless, but their injuries were, for the most part, immaterial; although rigging had been cut away, bulwarks smashed, and sides dinted. One gun of the Penelope had been disabled, and two of the Alexandra. Only five men had been killed, altogether, and twenty-seven wounded.

No sign was made of surrender, and an occasional fire was kept up on the forts, to prevent the Egyptians from repairing damages. At one o'clock, twelve volunteers from the Invincible started to destroy the guns of Fort Mex. Their fire had ceased, and no men were to be seen in the fort; but they might have been lying in wait to attack any landing party.

On nearing the shore, the surf was found to be too heavy for the boat to pass through it, and Major Tulloch and six men swam ashore and entered the fort. It was found to be deserted, and all the guns but two ten-inch pieces dismounted. The charges of gun cotton, that the swimmers brought ashore with them, were placed in the cannon; and their muzzles blown off. After performing this very gallant service, the little party swam back to their boat.

The British admiral's position was now a difficult one. There were no signs of surrender; for aught he could tell, fifteen thousand Egyptian troops might be lying round the ruined forts, or in the

town hard by, in readiness to oppose a landing. That these troops were not to be despised was evident, by the gallantry with which they had fought their guns. This force would be aided by the mass of the population; and it would be hazardous, indeed, to risk the loss of fifteen hundred men, and the reversal of the success already gained.

At the same time, it was painful to think that the Europeans on shore might be massacred, and the whole city destroyed, by the exasperated troops and fanatical population. It was known that the number of Englishmen there was not large, two or three hundred at most; but there was a much larger number of the lower class of Europeans–port labourers, fishermen, petty shopkeepers, and others–who had preferred taking their chance to the certainty of losing all their little possessions, if they left them.

Anxiously the glasses of those on board the ships were directed towards the shore, in hopes of seeing the white flag hoisted, or a boat come out with it flying; but there were no signs of the intentions of the defenders, and the fleet prepared to resume the action in the morning. Fort Marabout, and several of the batteries on the shore, were still unsilenced; and two heavy guns, mounted on the Moncrieff system (by which the gun rose to a level of the parapet, fired, and instantly sank again), had continued to fire all day, in spite of the efforts of the fleet to silence them.

Next morning, however, there was a long heavy swell, and the ironclads were rolling too heavily for anything like accuracy of aim; but as parties of men could be seen, at work in the Moncrieff battery, fire was opened upon them, and they speedily evacuated it.

All night, the Palace of Ras-el-Teen burned fiercely. Another great fire was raging in the heart of the town, and anxiety for those on shore, for the time, overpowered the feeling of exultation at the victory that had been gained.

At half-past ten a white flag was hoisted at the Pharos battery, and all on board watched, with deep anxiety, what was to follow. Lieutenant Lambton at once steamed into the fort, in the Bittern, to enquire if the government were ready to surrender. It was three o'clock before he steamed out again, with the news that his mission was fruitless; and that the white flag had only been hoisted, by the officer in command of the fort, to enable himself and his men to get away unmolested. Lieutenant Lambton had obtained an interview with the military governor, on behalf of the government, and told him that we were not at war with Egypt, and had simply destroyed the forts because they threatened the fleet; that we had no conditions to impose upon the government, but were ready to discuss any proposal; and that the troops would be allowed to evacuate the forts, with the honour of war.

It was most unfortunate that the fleet had not brought with them two or three thousand troops. Had they done so they could have landed at once, and saved a great portion of the town from destruction; but as he had no soldiers, the admiral could not land a portion of the sailors, as the large Egyptian force in the town, which was still protected by a number of land batteries, might fall upon them.

At five o'clock the Helicon was sent in to say that white flags would not be noticed, unless hoisted by authority; and if they were again shown, the British admiral would consider them the signs of a general surrender. It was a long time before the Helicon returned, with news that no communication had been received from the enemy, that the barracks and arsenals seemed to be deserted and, as far as could be seen, the whole town was evacuated.

As evening wore on, fresh fires broke out in all parts of the town, and a steam pinnace was sent ashore to ascertain, if possible, the state of affairs. Mr. Ross, a contractor for the supply of meat to the fleet, volunteered to accompany it.

The harbour was dark and deserted. Not a light was to be seen in the houses near the water. The crackling of the flames could be heard, with an occasional crash of falling walls and roofs. On nearing the landing place the pinnace paused, for two or three minutes, for those on board to listen; and as all was quiet, steamed alongside. Mr. Ross jumped ashore, and the boat backed off a few yards.

A quarter of an hour later, he returned. That quarter of the town was entirely deserted, and he had pushed on until arrested by a barrier of flames. The great square was on fire, from end to end; the European quarter generally was in flames; and he could see, by the litter that strewed the streets, that the houses had been plundered before being fired.

When daylight broke, a number of Europeans could be seen, at the edge of the water, in the harbour. Boats were at once lowered; and the crews, armed to the teeth, rowed ashore. Here they found about a hundred Europeans, many of them wounded. When rioting had broken out they had, as arranged, assembled at the Anglo-Egyptian Bank. They were taken off to the merchant steamers, lying behind the fleet, and their information confirmed the worst forebodings of the fugitives there.

When the first gun of the bombardment was fired, Gregory had gone up, with the other employees, to the top of the house; where they commanded a view over the whole scene of action. After the first few minutes' firing they could see but little, for batteries and ships were, alike, shrouded in smoke. At first, there had been some feeling of insecurity, and a doubt whether a shot too highly aimed might not come into the town; but the orders to abstain carefully from injuring the city had been well observed, and, except to the Palace and a few houses close to the water's edge, no damage was done.

Towards evening, all those who had resolved to remain behind gathered at the Anglo-Egyptian Bank, or at Mr. Ferguson's. But a consultation was held later, and it was agreed that next morning all should go to the bank, which was a far more massive building, with fewer entrances, and greater facilities for defence. When the town was quiet, therefore, all were employed in transferring valuable goods there, and the house was then locked up and left to its fate. Against a mere rising of the rabble the latter might have been successfully defended; but there was little doubt that, before leaving the town, the troops would join the fanatics; and in that case, a house not built with a special eye for defence could hardly hope to hold out, against persistent attack.

The bank, however, might hope to make a stout defence. It was built of massive stone, the lower windows were barred, and a strong barricade was built against the massive doors. A hundred and twenty resolute men, all well armed, could hold it against even a persistent attack, if unsupported by artillery.

Early in the afternoon, all felt that the critical moment had approached. Throughout the night a fire had raged, from the opposite side of the great square; where several deserted houses had been broken into, and plundered, by the mob; but the soldiers stationed in the square had prevented any further disorder.

Now, however, parties of troops from the forts began to pour in. It was already known that their losses had been very heavy, and that many of the forts had been destroyed. Soon they broke up and, joining the mob, commenced the work of pillage. Doors were blown in, shutters torn off and, with wild yells and shouts, the native population poured in. The work of destruction had begun.

The garrison of the bank saw many Europeans, hurrying, too late, to reach that shelter, murdered before their eyes. In the Levantine quarter, the cracking of pistols and the shouts of men showed that the work of massacre was proceeding there. Soon every door of the houses in the great square was forced in, and ere long great numbers of men, loaded with spoil of all kinds, staggered out.

So far the bank had been left alone; but it was now its turn, and the mob poured down upon it. As they came up, a sharp fire broke out from every window, answered by a discharge of muskets and pistols from the crowd. Here men fell fast, but they had been worked up to such a pitch of excitement, and fanaticism, that the gaps were more than filled by fresh comers.

All the afternoon and evening the fight continued. In vain the mob endeavoured to break down the massive iron bars of the windows, and batter in the doors. Although many of the defenders were wounded, and several killed; by the fire from the windows of the neighbouring houses, and from the road; their steady fire, at the points most hotly attacked, drove their assailants back again and again.

At twelve o'clock the assault slackened. The soldiers had long left and, so far as could be seen from the roof of the house, had entirely evacuated the town; and as this fact became known to the mob, the thought of the consequences of their action cooled their fury; for they knew that, probably, the troops would land from the British ships next day. Each man had his plunder to secure, and gradually the crowd melted away.

By two o'clock all was quiet; and although, occasionally, fresh fires burst out in various quarters of the town, there could be little doubt that the great bulk of the population had followed the example of the army, and had left the city.

Then the besieged gathered in the great office on the ground floor; and, as it was agreed that there would be probably no renewal of the attack, they quietly left the house, locking the doors after them, and made their way down to the shore. They believed that they were the only survivors, but when they reached the end of the town, they found that the building of the Credit Lyonnais had also been successfully defended, though the Ottoman Bank had been overpowered, and all within it, upwards of a hundred in number, killed.

Gregory had done his full share in the defence, and received a musket ball in the shoulder. His wife had passed a terrible time, while the conflagration was raging, and it was evident that the populace had risen, and were undoubtedly murdering as well as burning and plundering; and her delight was indeed great when she saw her husband, with others, approaching in a man-of-war's boat. The fact that one arm was in a sling was scarcely noticed, in her joy at his return, alive.

"Thank God, you are safe!" she said, as he came up the gangway. "It has been an awful time, and I had almost given up hope of ever seeing you alive, again."

"I told you, dear, that I felt confident we could beat off the scum of the town. Of course it was a sharp fight, but there was never any real danger of their breaking in. We only lost about half a dozen, out of nearly a hundred and twenty, and some twenty of us were wounded. My injury is not at all serious, and I shall soon be all right again. It is only a broken collarbone.

"However, it has been a terrible time. The great square, and almost all the European quarter, have been entirely destroyed. The destruction of property is something frightful, and most of the merchants will be absolutely ruined. Fortunately, our firm were insured, pretty well up to the full value."

"But I thought that they could not break in there?"

"We all moved out, the evening before, to the Anglo-Egyptian Bank. The town was full of troops, and we doubted whether we could hold the place. As the bank was much stronger, we agreed that it was better to join the two garrisons and fight it out there; and I am very glad we did so, for I doubt whether we could have defended our place, successfully."

Mr. Ferguson and the clerks had all come off with Gregory to the Simoon, on board which there was plenty of accommodation for them, as it was not one of the ships that had been taken up for the accommodation of the fugitives. Among the party who came on board was a doctor, who had taken part in the defence of the bank, and had attended to the wounded as the fight went on. He did so again that evening, and told Gregory that in a month he would, if he took care of himself, be able to use his arm again.

The next morning there was a consultation in the cabin. Mr. Ferguson had gone on shore, late the previous afternoon; as five hundred sailors had been landed, and had returned in the evening.

"It is certain," he said, "that nothing can be done until the place is rebuilt. The sailors are busy at work, fighting the fire, but there are continued fresh outbreaks. The bulk of the natives have left; but Arabi, before marching out, opened the prisons and released the convicts; and these and the scum of the town are still there, and continue the destruction whenever they get a chance. A score or two have been caught red handed and shot down, and a number of others have been flogged.

"Another batch of sailors will land this morning, and order will soon be restored; unless Arabi, who is encamped, with some ten thousand men, two miles outside the town, makes an effort to recover

the place. I don't think he is likely to do so, for now that the European houses have all been destroyed, there would be no longer any reluctance to bombard the town itself; and even if Arabi did recover it, he would very soon be shelled out.

"By the way, a larger number of people have been saved than was imagined. Several of the streets in the poor European quarters have escaped. The people barricaded the ends, and fought so desperately that their assailants drew off, finding it easier to plunder the better quarters. Even if the mob had overcome the resistance of the defenders of the lanes, they would have found little worth taking there; so some five hundred Europeans have escaped, and these will be very useful.

"Charley Beresford has charge of the police arrangements on shore, and he has gangs of them at work fighting the fire, and all the natives are forced to assist. The wires will be restored in a day or two, when I shall, of course, telegraph for instructions; and have no doubt that Mr. Partridge will send out orders to rebuild as soon as order is completely restored.

"I imagine that most of us will be recalled home, until that is done. Even if the place were intact, no business would be done, as our goods would be of little use to the navy or army; for no doubt an army will be sent. Arabi is as powerful as ever, but now that we have taken the matter in hand, it must be carried through.

"At any rate, there will be no clerks' work to be done here. The plans for a new building will naturally be prepared at home, and a foreman of works sent out. It is a bad job for us all, but as it is we must not complain; for we have escaped with our lives, and I hope that, in six months, we may open again. However, we can form no plans, until I receive instructions from home."

Gregory did not go ashore for the next week, by which time order had been completely restored, the fires extinguished, and the streets made, at least, passable. The sailors had been aided by a battalion of marines, which had been telegraphed for from Malta by the admiral, before the bombardment began. The Khedive had returned to Has-el-Teen, which had only been partly destroyed, as soon as the blue-jackets entered. His arrival put an end to all difficulties, as henceforward our operations were carried on, nominally, by his orders.

The American ships entered the harbour the next day and the naval officer in command landed one hundred and twenty-five men, to assist our blue-jackets; and, two days later, the 38th Regiment and a battalion of the 60th Rifles arrived.

The shops in the streets that escaped destruction gradually reopened, and country people began to bring in supplies. Many of the refugees on board the ships sailed for home, while those who found their houses still standing, although everything in them was smashed and destroyed, set to work to make them habitable. Soon temporary sheds were erected, and such portions of the cargoes on board the merchantmen as would be likely to find a sale, were landed.

Before the end of the week, Mr. Ferguson had received an answer to his telegram. Three days previously he had received a wire: "Have written fully." The letter came via Marseilles. After congratulations at the escape of himself and the staff, Mr. Partridge wrote:

"As you say that the house and warehouse are entirely destroyed, with all contents, there can be nothing for you and the clerks to do; and you had best return, at once, to England. I will make the best arrangements that I can for you all.

"As I have a plan of the ground, I have already instructed an architect to prepare a sketch for rebuilding, on a larger scale than before. The insurance companies are sending out agents to verify claims. Looking at your last report, it seems to me that the loss of goods, as well as that of buildings, will be fully covered. Should any of the staff determine to remain in Alexandria, and to take their chance of finding something to do, you are authorized to pay them three months' salary, and to promise to reinstate them, as soon as we reopen.

"I anticipate no further disturbances, whatever. A strong force is being sent out, and there can be no doubt that Arabi will be crushed, as soon as it is ready to take the field."

Other directions followed, but these were only amplifications of those mentioned.

"What do you think, Annie?" Gregory said, when Ferguson had read to his staff that portion of the letter that concerned them. "Shall we take the three months' pay and remain here, or shall we go back to England?"

"What do you think, yourself?"

"There are two lights in which to look at it, Annie. First, which would be best for us? And secondly, which shall we like best? Of course, the first is the more difficult point to decide. You see, Partridge doesn't say that we shall be kept on; he only says that he will do his best for us. I don't think that there is any chance of his keeping us on at full pay. If he intended to do so, it would have been cheaper for him to give us our pay here, in which case he would save our passages back to England and out again. I think we could not reckon on getting anything like full pay, while we were in England, and you know I have lost faith in my literary powers. I think I have improved, but I certainly should not like, after our last experience, to trust to that for keeping us, in England.

"The question is, what should I do here? There will be plenty of openings, for men who can speak the native language, as labour overseers. The contractors for food for the army will want men of that sort; and as I know several of them, through my work in the port and being in Partridge's house, I have no doubt I could get employment that way, and carry on very well till trade is open again, and obtain then a good deal better berth than they would offer me. No doubt, one could get employment in the transport or commissariat of the army, when it comes out. That will be a thing to think seriously of.

"My objections to that are personal ones. In the first place, it would lead to nothing when the affair is over. In the second place, I should be certain to meet men I knew at Harrow, or at the University, or since then; and I own that I should shrink from that. As Gregory Hilliard, I don't mind carrying a parcel or helping to load a dray; but I should not like, as Gregory Hartley, to be known to be doing that sort of thing. Personally I feel not the smallest humiliation in doing so, but I don't think it would be fair to Geoffrey. I should not like it myself, if I were an earl, for fellows who knew him to be able to say that my brother was knocking about in Egypt as an interpreter, or mule driver, or something of that sort. That certainly has to be taken into consideration.

"It is not likely that I should get any sort of berth that an officer would be appointed to, for every officer in the army, whose regiment is not coming out here, will be rushing to the War Office to apply for any sort of appointment that would enable him to come out to the war.

"Again, it is almost certain that, when this business is over–and I don't suppose it will last long, after we get an army out here–a fresh Egyptian force will be raised. You may be sure that the greater portion of our troops will be hurried back, as soon as it is over; and that, as the present Egyptian army will be altogether smashed up, it will be absolutely necessary that there should be a force, of some kind or other, that can put a stop to this Mahdi fellow's doings. He has overrun half the Soudan, and inflicted serious defeats on the Egyptian troops there. He has captured a considerable portion of Kordofan; and, of course, it is owing to his insurrection that those rows have occurred down at the Red Sea, where our men have been fighting.

"It is likely enough that they may appoint some British officers to the new force, and I might get a fair position on it. They will want interpreters there. Promotion will be sure to be rapid, and I might have opportunities of distinguishing myself, and get an appointment where I could, without discrediting it, take my own name again.

"These are only among the things that might be; but at the worst, I am certain to get some sort of post, at Alexandria, which would enable us to live without trenching upon the three months' pay that is offered me; and then, if I could see nothing better, I could return to Partridge's employment when they reopen here, and I have no doubt that they would improve my position.

"I don't think that Parrott is likely to come back again. The climate did not suit him, and he is always having attacks of fever. Ferguson has, I know, for he told me so, reported very favourably about my work to headquarters; and, as I have been wounded in defence of the house, I have an

additional claim. The others will, of course, be moved up, and I should get the junior clerkship–no advance in the way of remuneration, but a great improvement in position.

"So I think we had better accept the three months' pay, and take our chances. At any rate, there will be no fear of another disturbance at Alexandria. The mob have had a lesson here that they are not likely to forget, and I should fancy that, although we may withdraw the army, two or three regiments will be left here, and at Cairo, for a long time to come. We should be fools, indeed, if we threw away the money that this business will cost, before it is over, and let Egypt slip altogether out of our fingers again. France has forfeited her right to have anything to say in the matter. In our hands it will be a very valuable possession, and certainly our stay here would be of inestimable advantage to the natives, as we should govern Egypt as we govern India, and do away with the tyranny, oppression, and extortion of the native officials."

Mrs. Hilliard quite agreed with her husband; and accordingly, the next day, Gregory informed Mr. Ferguson that he would accept the three months' pay, and his discharge; and should, at any rate for a time, remain in Alexandria.

"I think you are right, Hilliard. There will be lots of opportunities here for a man who knows the language as you do. If you like, I will speak to Mr. Ross. I saw him yesterday, in the town, and he said that two of his assistants had been killed. He has already obtained a fresh contract, and a very heavy one, for the supply of meat for the troops as they arrive; and I have no doubt he would be very glad to engage you, on good terms, though the engagement could only be made during the stay of the army here."

"Thank you, sir. I shall be much obliged to you if you will do so; and I would rather that the engagement should be a temporary one, on both sides, so that I should be free to leave, at a few days' notice."

The contractor, after a chat with Gregory Hilliard, was glad to secure his services. He saw the advantage that it would be to have a gentleman to represent him, with the army, instead of an agent of a very different kind. Other men would do to purchase animals from the Arabs, or to receive them at the ports when they were brought over from Spain and Italy; but it required a variety of qualities, difficult to obtain in the same person, to act as agent with the army. Gregory was exactly the man required, and he was soon on excellent terms, both with the officers of the quartermaster's department, and the contractors who brought in the cargoes of cattle.

As soon as the bulk of the army sailed from Alexandria to Ismailia, he made the latter town his headquarters; and by his power of work, his tact and good temper, he smoothed away all the difficulties that so often arise between contractors and army officials, and won the goodwill of all with whom he came in contact. When the army removed to Cairo, after the defeat and dispersal of Arabi's force at Tel-el-Kebir, Gregory established himself there, and was joined by his wife and child.

As soon as matters settled down, and a considerable portion of the troops had left Egypt, Mr. Ross said to him:

"Of course, our operations in the future will be comparatively small, Mr. Hilliard, and I must reduce my staff."

"I quite understand that," Gregory replied, "and I knew that I should have to look out for something else."

"I shall be very sorry to lose your services, which have indeed been invaluable, and I am sure have been appreciated, by the army men as much as by myself. I certainly should not think of your leaving me, until you get another berth; and it is only because I see an opening, if you like to take it, that might lead to something better, in the future, than anything I can offer you.

"You know that Colonel Hicks arrived here, a fortnight since, and is to take command of the Egyptian army, and to have the rank of pasha. Several officers have received appointments on his staff. He will shortly be going up to Khartoum. I was speaking to him yesterday, and as I was doing so, two of the officers of Wolseley's staff came in. A question of supplies came up, and I mentioned

your name, and said that I thought that you were the very man for him, that you were master of Arabic, and an excellent organizer; and, a very important matter where there were so few English officers together, a gentleman.

"One of the officers, who knew the work that you had done, at once confirmed what I had said, and declared that Wolseley's quartermaster general would speak as warmly in your favour. Hicks told me that, until he got up to Khartoum, he could not say what arrangements would be made for the supplies; but that he would, at any rate, be very glad to have you with him, in the capacity of a first-class interpreter, and for general service with the staff, with the temporary rank of captain; with the special view of your services in organizing a supply train, when he moved forward. I said that I should speak to you, and ascertain your views."

"I am very much obliged to you, indeed. I must take twenty-four hours to think it over. Of course I shall be guided, to some extent, by the question whether the appointment would be likely to be a permanent one."

"That I have no doubt. Indeed, Hicks said as much. I asked him the question, and he replied, 'I can hardly make a permanent appointment now, as I am not quite in the saddle; but I have no doubt, from what you say, that Mr. Hilliard will make a valuable officer; and after our first campaign I shall, without difficulty, be able to obtain him a permanent appointment in the Egyptian army.'"

"I thank you, most heartily, Mr. Ross. It seems to me a grand opening. There is no doubt that, as our troops leave, the Egyptian army will be thoroughly reorganized; and there will be many openings for a man who knows the language, and is ready to work hard; and, no doubt, the regiments will be largely officered by Englishmen."

That evening, Gregory had a long talk with his wife.

"I don't like the thought of leaving you, even for a time; but no doubt, when the Mahdi is settled with, you will be able to join me at Khartoum; which, I believe, is by no means an unpleasant place to live in. Of course, I shall come down and take you up. It is a splendid chance, and will really be my reinstatement. Once holding a commission in the Egyptian army, I should resume my own name, and have the future to look forward to. Entering the service as the army is being reorganized, I should have a great pull, and should be sure to get on, and be able to write to my father and brother, without its appearing that I wanted help of any kind."

There were tears in Mrs. Hilliard's eyes, but she said bravely:

"I quite agree with you, Gregory. Of course, I shall be sorry that you should leave me, even for a time; but it seems to me, too, that it is a grand opportunity. You know what a pain it was to me, all the time that we were at Alexandria, that you should be working in such a subordinate position. Now there is an opening by which you will be in a position, ere long, more worthy of your birth and education. I have no doubt I shall get on very well, here. I believe that Hicks Pasha has brought his wife out with him here; and some of his officers will, no doubt, be married men also; and as the wife of one of his officers I shall, of course, get to know them. I should be selfish, indeed, to say a word to keep you back, and shall be delighted to think of you associating with other English gentlemen, as one of themselves."

And so it was settled. The next day, Gregory called on Hicks Pasha. The latter had made some more enquiries respecting him, and was well pleased with his appearance.

"I have already a gentleman named as staff interpreter, Mr. Hilliard, but I can appoint you, at once, interpreter to the quartermaster's department, attached to my personal staff for the present. I can tell you that the Egyptian army will be largely increased, and I shall be able, after a time, to procure you a better appointment. When we have once defeated the Mahdi, and restored order, there will be many appointments open for the reorganization of the Soudan. There are a good many preparations to be made, before I leave, which I expect to do in the course of three or four weeks; and I shall be glad of your assistance, as soon as you can join us."

"I shall be glad to do so, at once. Mr. Ross has kindly told me that I am at liberty to resign my post, under him, as soon as I like."

"Very well, then. You may consider yourself appointed, today. My intention is to go first to Suakim, and thence up to Berber, and so by water to Khartoum."

The next three weeks passed rapidly. Gregory was, on the following day, introduced to the various officers of Hicks Pasha's staff; and, on learning that he was married, the general asked him and his wife to dinner, to make the acquaintance of Lady Hicks, and the wives of three of his fellow officers.

At last, the time came for parting. Annie bore up well; and although, when alone, she had many a cry, she was always cheerful, and went with her husband and saw him off, at the station of the railway for Ismailia, without breaking down badly.

Chapter 3: A Terrible Disaster

It was an anxious time for his wife, after Gregory started. He, and those with him, had left with a feeling of confidence that the insurrection would speedily be put down. The garrison of Khartoum had inflicted several severe defeats upon the Mahdi, but had also suffered some reverses. This, however, was only to be expected, when the troops under him were scarcely more disciplined than those of the Dervishes, who had always been greatly superior in numbers, and inspired with a fanatical belief in their prophet. But with British officers to command, and British officers to drill and discipline the troops, there could be no fear of a recurrence of these disasters.

Before they started, Mrs. Hilliard had become intimate with the wife of Hicks Pasha, and those of the other married officers, and had paid visits with them to the harems of high Turkish officials. Visits were frequently exchanged, and what with these, and the care of the boy, her time was constantly occupied. She received letters from Gregory, as frequently as possible, after his arrival at Omdurman, and until he set out with the main body, under the general, on the way to El Obeid.

Before starting, he said he hoped that, in another two months, the campaign would be over, El Obeid recovered, and the Mahdi smashed up; and that, as soon as they returned to Khartoum, Hicks Pasha would send for his wife and daughters, and the other married officers for their wives; and, of course, she would accompany them.

"I cannot say much for Omdurman," he wrote; "but Khartoum is a nice place. Many of the houses there have shady gardens. Hicks has promised to recommend me for a majority, in one of the Turkish regiments. In the intervals of my own work, I have got up drill. I shall, of course, tell him then what my real name is, so that I can be gazetted in it. It is likely enough that, even after we defeat the Mahdi, this war may go on for some time before it is stamped out; and in another year I may be a full-blown colonel, if only an Egyptian one; and as the pay of the English officers is good, I shall be able to have a very comfortable home for you.

"I need not repeat my instructions, darling, as to what you must do in the event, improbable as it is, of disaster. When absolutely assured of my death, but not until then, you will go back to England with the boy, and see my father. He is not a man to change his mind, unless I were to humble myself before him; but I think he would do the right thing for you. If he will not, there is the letter for Geoffrey. He has no settled income at present, but when he comes into the title he will, I feel quite certain, make you an allowance. I know that you would, for yourself, shrink from doing this; but, for the boy's sake, you will not hesitate to carry out my instructions. I should say you had better write to my father, for the interview might be an unpleasant one; but if you have to appeal to Geoffrey, you had better call upon him and show him this letter. I feel sure that he will do what he can.

"Gregory."

A month later, a messenger came up from Suakim with a despatch, dated October 3rd. The force was then within a few days' march of El Obeid. The news was not altogether cheering. Hordes of the enemy hovered about their rear. Communication was already difficult, and they had to depend upon the stores they carried, and cut themselves off altogether from the base. He brought some private letters from the officers, and among them one for Mrs. Hilliard. It was short, and written in pencil:

"In a few days, Dear, the decisive battle will take place; and although it will be a tough fight, none of us have any fear of the result. In the very improbable event of a defeat, I shall, if I have time, slip on the Arab dress I have with me, and may hope to escape. However, I have little fear that it will come to that. God bless and protect you, and the boy!

"Gregory."

A month passed away. No news came from Hicks Pasha, or any of his officers. Then there were rumours current in the bazaars, of disaster; and one morning, when Annie called upon Lady Hicks, she found several of the ladies there with pale and anxious faces. She paused at the door.

"Do not be alarmed, Mrs. Hilliard," Lady Hicks said. "Nizim Pasha has been here this morning. He thought that I might have heard the rumours that are current in the bazaar, that there has been a disaster, but he says there is no confirmation whatever of these reports. He does not deny, however, that they have caused anxiety among the authorities; for sometimes these rumours, whose origin no one knows, do turn out to be correct. He said that enquiries have been made, but no foundation for the stories can be got at. I questioned him closely, and he says that he can only account for them on the ground that, if a victory had been won, an official account from government should have been here before this; and that it is solely on this account that these rumours have got about. He said there was no reason for supposing that this silence meant disaster. A complete victory might have been won; and yet the messenger with the despatches might have been captured, and killed, by the parties of tribesmen hanging behind the army, or wandering about the country between the army and Khartoum. Still, of course, this is making us all very anxious."

The party soon broke up, none having any reassuring suggestions to offer; and Annie returned to her lodging, to weep over her boy, and pray for the safety of his father. Days and weeks passed, and still no word came to Cairo. At Khartoum there was a ferment among the native population. No secret was made of the fact that the tribesmen who came and went all declared that Hicks Pasha's army was utterly destroyed. At length, the Egyptian government announced to the wives of the officers that pensions would be given to them, according to the rank of their husbands. As captain and interpreter, Gregory's wife had but a small one, but it was sufficient for her to live upon.

One by one, the other ladies gave up hope and returned to England, but Annie stayed on. Misfortune might have befallen the army, but Gregory might have escaped in disguise. She had, like the other ladies, put on mourning for him; for had she declared her belief that he might still be alive, she could not have applied for the pension, and this was necessary for the child's sake. Of one thing she was determined. She would not go with him, as beggars, to the father who had cast Gregory off; until, as he had said, she received absolute news of his death. She was not in want; but as her pension was a small one, and she felt that it would be well for her to be employed, she asked Lady Hicks, before she left, to mention at the houses of the Egyptian ladies to whom she went to say goodbye, that Mrs. Hilliard would be glad to give lessons in English, French, or music.

The idea pleased them, and she obtained several pupils. Some of these were the ladies themselves, and the lessons generally consisted in sitting for an hour with them, two or three times a week, and talking to them; the conversation being in short sentences, of which she gave them the English translation, which they repeated over and over again, until they knew them by heart. This caused great amusement, and was accompanied by much laughter, on the part of the ladies and their attendants.

Several of her pupils, however, were young boys and girls, and the teaching here was of a more serious kind. The lessons to the boys were given the first thing in the morning, and the pupils were brought to her house by attendants. At eleven o'clock she taught the girls, and returned at one, and had two hours more teaching in the afternoon. She could have obtained more pupils, had she wished to; but the pay she received, added to her income, enabled her to live very comfortably, and to save up money. She had a Negro servant, who was very fond of the boy, and she could leave him in her charge with perfect confidence, while she was teaching.

In the latter part of 1884, she ventured to hope that some news might yet come to her, for a British expedition had started for the relief of General Gordon, who had gone up early in the year to Khartoum; where it was hoped that the influence he had gained among the natives, at the time he was in command of the Egyptian forces in the Soudan, would enable him to make head against the insurrection. His arrival had been hailed by the population, but it was soon evident to him that, unless aided by England with something more than words, Khartoum must finally fall.

But his requests for aid were slighted. He had asked that two regiments should be sent from Suakim, to keep open the route to Berber, but Mr. Gladstone's government refused even this slight

assistance to the man they had sent out, and it was not until May that public indignation, at this base desertion of one of the noblest spirits that Britain ever produced, caused preparations for his rescue to be made; and it was December before the leading regiment arrived at Korti, far up the Nile.

After fighting two hard battles, a force that had marched across the loop of the Nile came down upon it above Metemmeh. A party started up the river at once, in two steamers which Gordon had sent down to meet them, but only arrived near the town to hear that they were too late, that Khartoum had fallen, and that Gordon had been murdered. The army was at once hurried back to the coast, leaving it to the Mahdists–more triumphant than ever–to occupy Dongola; and to push down, and possibly, as they were confident they should do, to capture Egypt itself.

The news of the failure was a terrible blow to Mrs. Hilliard. She had hoped that, when Khartoum was relieved, some information at least might be obtained, from prisoners, as to the fate of the British officers at El Obeid. That most of them had been killed was certain, but she still clung to the hope that her husband might have escaped from the general massacre, thanks to his knowledge of the language, and the disguise he had with him; and even that if captured later on he might be a prisoner; or that he might have escaped detection altogether, and be still living among friendly tribesmen. It was a heavy blow to her, therefore, when she heard that the troops were being hurried down to the coast, and that the Mahdi would be uncontested master of Egypt, as far as Assouan.

She did, however, receive news when the force returned to Cairo, which, although depressing, did not extinguish all hope. Lieutenant Colonel Colborne, by good luck, had ascertained that a native boy in the service of General Buller claimed to have been at El Obeid. Upon questioning him closely, he found out that he had unquestionably been there, for he described accurately the position Colonel Colborne–who had started with Hicks Pasha, but had been forced by illness to return–had occupied in one of the engagements. The boy was then the slave of an Egyptian officer of the expedition.

The army had suffered much from want of water, but they had obtained plenty from a lake within three days' march from El Obeid. From this point they were incessantly fired at, by the enemy. On the second day they were attacked, but beat off the enemy, though with heavy loss to themselves. The next day they pressed forward, as it was necessary to get to water; but they were misled by their guide, and at noon the Arabs burst down upon them, the square in which the force was marching was broken, and a terrible slaughter took place. Then Hicks Pasha, with his officers, seeing that all was lost, gathered together and kept the enemy at bay with their revolvers, till their ammunition was exhausted. After that they fought with their swords till all were killed, Hicks Pasha being the last to fall. The lad himself hid among the dead and was not discovered until the next morning, when he was made a slave by the man who found him.

This was terrible! But there was still hope. If this boy had concealed himself among the dead, her husband might have done the same. Not being a combatant officer, he might not have been near the others when the affair took place; and moreover, the lad had said that the black regiment in the rear of the square had kept together and marched away; he believed all had been afterwards killed, but this he did not know. If Gregory had been there when the square was broken, he might well have kept with them, and at nightfall slipped on his disguise and made his escape. It was at least possible–she would not give up all hope.

So years went on. Things were quiet in Egypt. A native army had been raised there, under the command of British officers, and these had checked the northern progress of the Mahdists and restored confidence in Egypt. Gregory–for the boy had been named after his father–grew up strong and hearty. His mother devoted her evenings to his education. From the Negress, who was his nurse and the general servant of the house, he had learnt to talk her native language. She had been carried off, when ten years old, by a slave-raiding party, and sold to an Egyptian trader at Khartoum; been given by him to an Atbara chief, with whom he had dealings; and, five years later, had been captured in a tribal war by the Jaalin. Two or three times she had changed masters, and finally had been purchased by an Egyptian officer, and brought down by him to Cairo. At his death, four years afterwards, she

had been given her freedom, being now past fifty, and had taken service with Gregory Hilliard and his wife. Her vocabulary was a large one, and she was acquainted with most of the dialects of the Soudan tribes.

From the time when her husband was first missing, Mrs. Hilliard cherished the idea that, some day, the child might grow up and search for his father; and, perhaps, ascertain his fate beyond all doubt. She was a very conscientious woman, and was resolved that, at whatever pain to herself, she would, when once certain of her husband's death, go to England and obtain recognition of his boy by his family. But it was pleasant to think that the day was far distant when she could give up hope. She saw, too, that if the Soudan was ever reconquered, the knowledge of the tribal languages must be of immense benefit to her son; and she therefore insisted, from the first, that the woman should always talk to him in one or other of the languages that she knew.

Thus Gregory, almost unconsciously, acquired several of the dialects used in the Soudan. Arabic formed the basis of them all, except the Negro tongue. At first he mixed them up, but as he grew, Mrs. Hilliard insisted that his nurse should speak one for a month, and then use another; so that, by the time he was twelve years old, the boy could speak in the Negro tongue, and half a dozen dialects, with equal facility.

His mother had, years before, engaged a teacher of Arabic for him. This he learned readily, as it was the root of the Egyptian and the other languages he had picked up. Of a morning, he sat in the school and learned pure Arabic and Turkish, while the boys learned English; and therefore, without an effort, when he was twelve years old he talked these languages as well as English; and had, moreover, a smattering of Italian and French, picked up from boys of his own age, for his mother had now many acquaintances among the European community.

While she was occupied in the afternoon, with her pupils, the boy had liberty to go about as he pleased; and indeed she encouraged him to take long walks, to swim, and to join in all games and exercises.

"English boys at home," she said, "have many games, and it is owing to these that they grow up so strong and active. They have more opportunities than you, but you must make the most of those that you have. We may go back to England some day, and I should not at all like you to be less strong than others."

As, however, such opportunities were very small, she had an apparatus of poles, horizontal bars, and ropes set up, such as those she had seen, in England, in use by the boys of one of the families where she had taught, before her marriage; and insisted upon Gregory's exercising himself upon it for an hour every morning, soon after sunrise. As she had heard her husband once say that fencing was a splendid exercise, not only for developing the figure, but for giving a good carriage as well as activity and alertness, she arranged with a Frenchman who had served in the army, and had gained a prize as a swordsman in the regiment, to give the boy lessons two mornings in the week.

Thus, at fifteen, Gregory was well grown and athletic, and had much of the bearing and appearance of an English public-school boy. His mother had been very particular in seeing that his manners were those of an Englishman.

"I hope the time will come when you will associate with English gentlemen, and I should wish you, in all respects, to be like them. You belong to a good family; and should you, by any chance, some day go home, you must do credit to your dear father."

The boy had, for some years, been acquainted with the family story, except that he did not know the name he bore was his father's Christian name, and not that of his family.

"My grandfather must have been a very bad man, Mother, to have quarreled with my father for marrying you."

"Well, my boy, you hardly understand the extent of the exclusiveness of some Englishmen. Of course, it is not always so, but to some people, the idea of their sons or daughters marrying into a

family of less rank than themselves appears to be an almost terrible thing. As I have told you, although the daughter of a clergyman, I was, when I became an orphan, obliged to go out as a governess."

"But there was no harm in that, Mother?"

"No harm, dear; but a certain loss of position. Had my father been alive, and had I been living with him in a country rectory, your grandfather might not have been pleased at your father's falling in love with me, because he would probably have considered that, being, as you know by his photograph, a fine, tall, handsome man, and having the best education money could give him, he might have married very much better; that is to say, the heiress of a property, or into a family of influence, through which he might have been pushed on; but he would not have thought of opposing the marriage on the ground of my family. But a governess is a different thing. She is, in many cases, a lady in every respect, but her position is a doubtful one.

"In some families she is treated as one of themselves. In others, her position is very little different from that of an upper servant. Your grandfather was a passionate man, and a very proud man. Your father's elder brother was well provided for, but there were two sisters, and these and your father he hoped would make good marriages. He lived in very good style, but your uncle was extravagant, and your grandfather was over indulgent, and crippled himself a good deal in paying the debts that he incurred. It was natural, therefore, that he should have objected to your father's engagement to what he called a penniless governess. It was only what was to be expected. If he had stated his objections to the marriage calmly, there need have been no quarrel. Your father would assuredly have married me, in any case; and your grandfather might have refused to assist him, if he did so, but there need have been no breakup in the family, such as took place.

"However, as it was, your father resented his tone, and what had been merely a difference of opinion became a serious quarrel, and they never saw each other, afterwards. It was a great grief to me, and it was owing to that, and his being unable to earn his living in England, that your father brought me out here. I believe he would have done well at home, though it would have been a hard struggle. At that time I was very delicate, and was ordered by the doctors to go to a warm climate, and therefore your father accepted a position of a kind which, at least, enabled us to live, and obtained for me the benefit of a warm climate.

"Then the chance came of his going up to the Soudan, and there was a certainty that, if the expedition succeeded, as everyone believed it would, he would have obtained permanent rank in the Egyptian army, and so recovered the position in life that he had voluntarily given up, for my sake."

"And what was the illness you had, Mother?"

"It was an affection of the lungs, dear. It was a constant cough, that threatened to turn to consumption, which is one of the most fatal diseases we have in England."

"But it hasn't cured you, Mother, for I often hear you coughing, at night."

"Yes, my cough has been a little troublesome of late, Gregory."

Indeed, from the time of the disaster to the expedition of Hicks Pasha, Annie Hilliard had lost ground. She herself was conscious of it; but, except for the sake of the boy, she had not troubled over it. She had not altogether given up hope, but the hope grew fainter and fainter, as the years went on. Had it not been for the promise to her husband, not to mention his real name or to make any application to his father unless absolutely assured of his death, she would, for Gregory's sake, have written to Mr. Hartley, and asked for help that would have enabled her to take the boy home to England, and have him properly educated there. But she had an implicit faith in the binding of a promise so made, and as long as she was not driven, by absolute want, to apply to Mr. Hartley, was determined to keep to it.

A year after this conversation, Gregory was sixteen. Now tall and strong, he had, for some time past, been anxious to obtain some employment that would enable his mother to give up her teaching. Some of this, indeed, she had been obliged to relinquish. During the past few months her cheeks had become hollow, and her cough was now frequent by day, as well as by night. She had consulted an

English doctor, who, she saw by the paper, was staying at Shepherd's Hotel. He had hesitated before giving a direct opinion, but on her imploring him to tell her the exact state of her health, said gently:

"I am afraid, madam, that I can give you no hope of recovery. One lung has already gone, the other is very seriously diseased. Were you living in England, I should say that your life might be prolonged by taking you to a warm climate; but as it is, no change could be made for the better."

"Thank you, Doctor. I wanted to know the exact truth, and be able to make my arrangements accordingly. I was quite convinced that my condition was hopeless, but I thought it right to consult a physician, and to know how much time I could reckon on. Can you tell me that?"

"That is always difficult, Mrs. Hilliard. It may be three months hence. It might be more speedily–a vessel might give way in the lungs, suddenly. On the other hand, you might live six months. Of course, I cannot say how rapid the progress of the disease has been."

"It may not be a week, doctor. I am not at all afraid of hearing your sentence–indeed, I can see it in your eyes."

"It may be within a week"–the doctor bowed his head gravely–"it may be at any time."

"Thank you!" she said, quietly. "I was sure it could not be long. I have been teaching, but three weeks ago I had to give up my last pupil. My breath is so short that the slightest exertion brings on a fit of coughing."

On her return home she said to Gregory:

"My dear boy, you must have seen–you cannot have helped seeing–that my time is not long here. I have seen an English doctor today, and he says the end may come at any moment."

"Oh, Mother, Mother!" the lad cried, throwing himself on his knees, and burying his face in her lap, "don't say so!"

The news, indeed, did not come as a surprise to him. He had, for months, noticed the steady change in her: how her face had fallen away, how her hands seemed nerveless, her flesh transparent, and her eyes grew larger and larger. Many times he had walked far up among the hills and, when beyond the reach of human eye, thrown himself down and cried unrestrainedly, until his strength seemed utterly exhausted, and yet the verdict now given seemed to come as a sudden blow.

"You must not break down, dear," she said quietly. "For months I have felt that it was so; and, but for your sake, I did not care to live. I thank God that I have been spared to see you growing up all that I could wish; and though I should have liked to see you fairly started in life, I feel that you may now make your way, unaided.

"Now I want, before it is too late, to give you instructions. In my desk you will find a sealed envelope. It contains a copy of the registers of my marriage, and of your birth. These will prove that your father married, and had a son. You can get plenty of witnesses who can prove that you were the child mentioned. I promised your father that I would not mention our real name to anyone, until it was necessary for me to write to your grandfather. I have kept that promise. His name was Gregory Hilliard, so we have not taken false names. They were his Christian names. The third name, his family name, you will find when you open that envelope.

"I have been thinking, for months past, what you had best do; and this is my advice, but do not look upon it as an order. You are old enough to think for yourself. You know that Sir Herbert Kitchener, the Sirdar, is pushing his way up the Nile. I have no doubt that, with your knowledge of Arabic, and of the language used by the black race in the Soudan, you will be able to obtain some sort of post in the army, perhaps as an interpreter to one of the officers commanding a brigade–the same position, in fact, as your father had, except that the army is now virtually British, whereas that he went with was Egyptian.

"I have two reasons for desiring this. I do not wish you to go home, until you are in a position to dispense with all aid from your family. I have done without it, and I trust that you will be able to do the same. I should like you to be able to go home at one-and-twenty, and to say to your grandfather, 'I

have not come home to ask for money or assistance of any kind. I am earning my living honourably. I only ask recognition, by my family, as my father's son.'

"It is probable that this expedition will last fully two years. It must be a gradual advance, and even then, if the Khalifa is beaten, it must be a considerable time before matters are thoroughly settled. There will be many civil posts open to those who, like yourself, are well acquainted with the language of the country; and if you can obtain one of these, you may well remain there until you come of age. You can then obtain a few months' leave of absence and go to England.

"My second reason is that, although my hope that your father is still alive has almost died out, it is just possible that he is, like Neufeld and some others, a prisoner in the Khalifa's hands; or possibly living as an Arab cultivator near El Obeid. Many prisoners will be taken, and from some of these we may learn such details, of the battle, as may clear us of the darkness that hangs over your father's fate.

"When you do go home, Gregory, you had best go first to your father's brother. His address is on a paper in the envelope. He was heir to a peerage, and has, perhaps, now come into it. I have no reasons for supposing that he sided with his father against yours. The brothers were not bad friends, although they saw little of each other; for your father, after he left Oxford, was for the most part away from England, until a year before his marriage; and at that time your uncle was in America, having gone out with two or three others on a hunting expedition among the Rocky Mountains. There is, therefore, no reason for supposing that he will receive you otherwise than kindly, when once he is sure that you are his nephew. He may, indeed, for aught I know, have made efforts to discover your father, after he returned from abroad."

"I would rather leave them alone altogether, Mother," Gregory said passionately.

"That you cannot do, my boy. Your father was anxious that you should be at least recognized, and afterwards bear your proper name. You will not be going as a beggar, and there will be nothing humiliating. As to your grandfather, he may not even be alive. It is seldom that I see an English newspaper, and even had his death been advertised in one of the papers, I should hardly have noticed it, as I never did more than just glance at the principal items of news.

"In my desk you will also see my bank book. It is in your name. I have thought it better that it should stand so, as it will save a great deal of trouble, should anything happen to me. Happily, I have never had any reasons to draw upon it, and there are now about five hundred and fifty pounds standing to your credit. Of late you have generally paid in the money, and you are personally known to the manager. Should there be any difficulty, I have made a will leaving everything to you. That sum will keep you, if you cannot obtain the employment we speak of, until you come of age; and will, at any rate, facilitate your getting employment with the army, as you will not be obliged to demand much pay, and can take anything that offers.

"Another reason for your going to England is that your grandfather may, if he is dead, have relented at last towards your father, and may have left him some share in his fortune; and although you might well refuse to accept any help from him, if he is alive, you can have no hesitation in taking that which should be yours by right. I think sometimes now, my boy, that I have been wrong in not accepting the fact of your father's death as proved, and taking you home to England; but you will believe that I acted for the best, and I shrank from the thought of going home as a beggar, while I could maintain you and myself comfortably, here."

"You were quite right, Mother dear. We have been very happy, and I have been looking forward to the time when I might work for you, as you have worked for me. It has been a thousand times better, so, than living on the charity of a man who looked down upon you, and who cast off my father."

"Well, you will believe at least that I acted for the best, dear, and I am not sure that it has not been for the best. At any rate I, too, have been far happier than I could have been, if living in England on an allowance begrudged to me."

A week later, Gregory was awakened by the cries of the Negro servant; and, running to Mrs. Hilliard's bedroom, found that his mother had passed away during the night. Burial speedily follows

death in Egypt; and on the following day Gregory returned, heartbroken, to his lonely house, after seeing her laid in her grave.

For a week, he did nothing but wander about the house, listlessly. Then, with a great effort, he roused himself. He had his work before him–had his mother's wishes to carry out. His first step was to go to the bank, and ask to see the manager.

"You may have heard of my mother's death, Mr. Murray?" he said.

"Yes, my lad, and sorry, indeed, I was to hear of it. She was greatly liked and respected, by all who knew her."

"She told me," Gregory went on, trying to steady his voice, "a week before her death, that she had money here deposited in my name."

"That is so."

"Is there anything to be done about it, sir?"

"Not unless you wish to draw it out. She told me, some time ago, why she placed it in your name; and I told her that there would be no difficulty."

"I do not want to draw any of it out, sir, as there were fifty pounds in the house. She was aware that she had not long to live, and no doubt kept it by her, on purpose."

"Then all you have to do is to write your signature on this piece of paper. I will hand you a cheque book, and you will only have to fill up a cheque and sign it, and draw out any amount you please."

"I have never seen a cheque book, sir. Will you kindly tell me what I should have to do?"

Mr. Murray took out a cheque book, and explained its use. Then he asked what Gregory thought of doing.

"I wish to go up with the Nile expedition, sir. It was my mother's wish, also, that I should do so. My main object is to endeavour to obtain particulars of my father's death, and to assure myself that he was one of those who fell at El Obeid. I do not care in what capacity I go up; but as I speak Arabic and Soudanese, as well as English, my mother thought that I might get employment as interpreter, either under an officer engaged on making the railway, or in some capacity under an officer in one of the Egyptian regiments."

"I have no doubt that I can help you there, lad. I know the Sirdar, and a good many of the British officers, for whom I act as agent. Of course, I don't know in what capacity they could employ you, but surely some post or other could be found for you, where your knowledge of the language would render you very useful. Naturally, the officers in the Egyptian service all understand enough of the language to get on with, but few of the officers in the British regiments do.

"It is fortunate that you came today. I have an appointment with Lord Cromer tomorrow morning, so I will take the opportunity of speaking to him. As it is an army affair, and as your father was in the Egyptian service, and your mother had a pension from it, I may get him to interest himself in the matter. Kitchener is down here at present, and if Cromer would speak to him, I should think you would certainly be able to get up, though I cannot say in what position. The fact that you are familiar with the Negro language, which differs very widely from that of the Arab Soudan tribes, who all speak Arabic, is strongly in your favour; and may give you an advantage over applicants who can only speak Arabic.

"I shall see Lord Cromer at ten, and shall probably be with him for an hour. You may as well be outside his house, at half-past ten; possibly he may like to see you. At any rate, when I come down, I can tell you what he says."

With grateful thanks, Gregory returned home.

Chapter 4: An Appointment

Soon after ten, next morning, Gregory took up his place near the entrance to Lord Cromer's house. It was just eleven when Mr. Murray came down.

"Come in with me," he said. "Lord Cromer will see you. He acknowledged at once, when I told him your story, that you had a strong claim for employment. The only point was as to your age. I told him that you were past sixteen, and a strong, active fellow, and that you had had a good physical training."

They had now entered the house.

"Don't be nervous, Hilliard; just talk to him as you would to me. Many a good man has lost an appointment, from being nervous and embarrassed when he applied for it."

"You want to go up to the Soudan?" Lord Cromer said. "Mr. Murray has told me your reasons for wanting to go. Though I fear it is hardly likely that any new light can be thrown upon the fate of Hicks Pasha, and his officers, I feel that it is a natural desire on your part."

"It was my mother's last wish, sir, and she took particular pains in my training, and education, to fit me for the work."

"You speak Arabic, and the tongue of the Negro blacks, almost as well as English?"

"Yes, sir. Arabic quite as well, and the other nearly as well, I think."

"What sort of post did you hope to get, Mr. Hilliard?"

"Any post for which I may be thought fit, sir. I do not care at all about pay. My mother saved sufficient to keep me for two or three years. I would rather enlist than not go up at all, though I fear I am too young to be accepted; but I am quite ready to turn my hand to anything."

"If it concerned the Egyptian government, or a civil appointment, I would certainly exert my influence in your favour; but this expedition is in the hands of the military. However, if you will take a seat in the anteroom, and do not mind waiting there for an hour or two, I will see what can be done."

"Thank you very much indeed, sir."

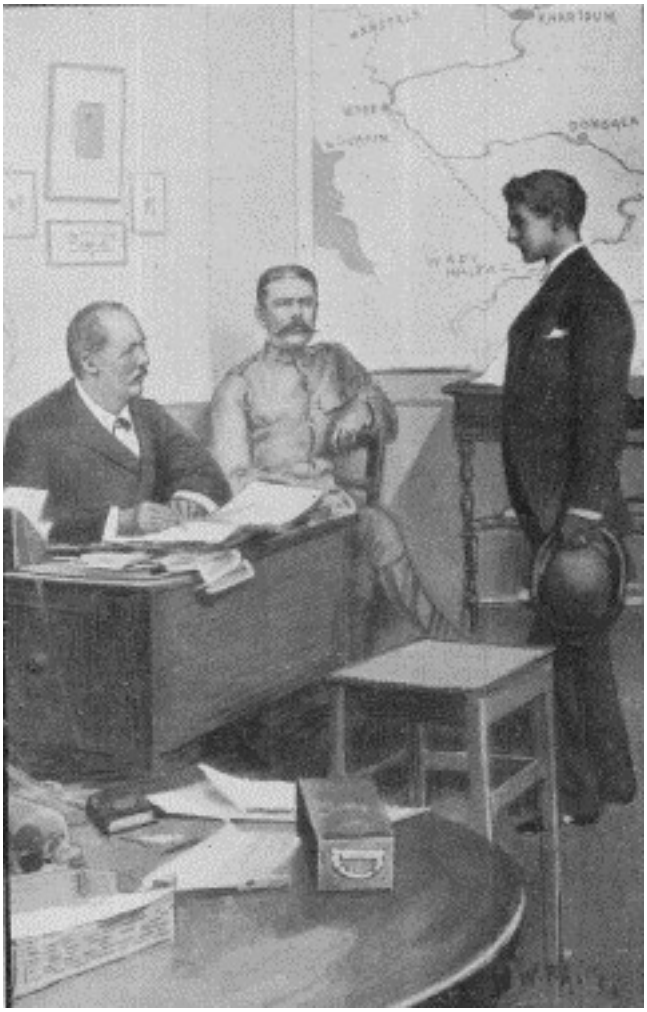
Mr. Murray, as they went out together, said:

"I think that you have made a good impression. He told me, before, that it was a matter for Sir Herbert Kitchener, and that he was expecting him in a quarter of an hour. Come and tell me the result, when you leave."

Ten minutes later, a tall man, whom Gregory recognized at once as Sir Herbert Kitchener, whose figure was well known in Cairo, passed through the room; all who were sitting there rising to their feet, as he did so. He acknowledged the salute mechanically, as if scarcely conscious of it. An hour later a bell was rung, and an attendant went into the room. He returned directly.

"Mr. Hilliard," he said.

Gregory rose, and passed through the door held open. Kitchener was sitting at the table with Lord Cromer. His keen glance seemed, to Gregory, to take him in from head to foot, and then to look at something far beyond him.



"This is Mr. Hilliard," Lord Cromer said, "the young gentleman I have spoken of."

"You want to go up?" the general said shortly, in Arabic.

"Yes, sir."

"You do not mind in what capacity you go?"

"No, sir; I am ready to do anything."

"To work on the railway, or in the transport?"

"Yes, sir. Though I would rather not be on the railway, for the railway cannot get on as fast as the troops; but I would enlist in one of the English regiments, if they would take me."

"And you speak the language of the Nubian blacks?"

The question was put in that language.

"Yes; I do not think I speak it quite as well as Arabic, but I speak it fairly."

"Do you think that you could stand the fatigue?–no child's play, you know."

"I can only say that I hope I can, sir. I have been accustomed to take long walks, and spend an hour a day in gymnastic exercises, and I have had lessons in fencing."

"Can you use a pistol?"

"Yes, fairly; I have practised a good deal with it."

"You are most fitted for an interpreter," the general said, speaking this time in English. "Now the North Staffordshire have come down, there are no British regiments up there, and of course the British officers in the Egyptian army all speak Arabic, to some extent. However, I will send you up to Dongola. Either General Hunter, or Colonel Wingate, of the Intelligence Department, may be able to

find some use for you; and when the British troops go up, you can be attached to one of their regiments as their interpreter. You will have temporary rank of lieutenant, with, of course, the pay of that rank.

"Captain Ewart came with me, Lord Cromer. I left him in the anteroom. If you will allow me, I will call him in.

"Captain Ewart," he said, as that officer entered, "Mr. Hilliard here has just received the temporary rank of lieutenant, in the Egyptian army, and is going up to join General Hunter, at Dongola. You are starting in three days, are you not?

"I shall be glad if you will take him under your wing, as far as you go. He speaks the languages, Negro as well as Arabic. You can tell him what kit he had better take, and generally mother him.

"That is all, Mr. Hilliard. Call at my quarters, the day after tomorrow, for the letters for General Hunter and Colonel Wingate."

"I thank you most deeply, sir," Gregory began, but the Sirdar gave a little impatient wave with his hand.

"Thank you most deeply also, Lord Cromer!" Gregory said with a bow, and then left the room.

Captain Ewart remained there for another ten minutes. When he came out, he nodded to Gregory.

"Will you come with me?" he said. "I am going to the bank. I shall not be there many minutes, and we can then have a talk together."

"Thank you, sir! I am going to the bank too. It was Mr. Murray who first spoke to Lord Cromer about me."

"You could not have had a better introduction. Well, you won't have very long to get ready for the start–that is, if you have not begun to prepare for it. However, there is no rush at present, therefore I have no doubt you will be able to get your khaki uniforms in time. As for other things, there will be no difficulty about them."

"You have been up at the front before, sir?"

"Yes, my work is on the railway. I had a touch of fever, and got leave to come down and recruit, before the hot weather came in. I dare say you think it hot here, sometimes, but this is an ice house in comparison with the desert."

They talked until they arrived at the bank.

"You may as well go in first, and see Murray. I suppose you won't be above two or three minutes. I shall be longer, perhaps a quarter of an hour; so if you wait for me, we will go to Shepherd's, and talk your business over in some sort of comfort."

"I am pleased, indeed," Mr. Murray said, when Gregory told him of his appointment. "It is better than I even hoped. It is bad enough there, in the position of an officer, but it would be infinitely worse in any other capacity. Do you want to draw any money?"

"No, sir; I have fifty pounds by me, and that will be enough, I should think, for everything."

"More than ample. Of course, you have plenty of light underclothing of all sorts, and a couple of suits of khaki will not cost you anything like so much as they would, if you got them at a military tailor's in London. However, if you want more, you will be able to draw it."

"Thank you very much, sir! I will not detain you any longer, now; but will, if you will allow me, come in to say goodbye before I start. Captain Ewart is waiting to speak to you. He came with me from Lord Cromer's."

Captain Ewart then went in, and after settling the business on which he had come, asked Mr. Murray questions about Gregory, and received a sketch of his story.

"He seems to be a fine young fellow," he said, "well grown and active, not at all what one would expect from a product of Cairo."

"No, indeed. Of course, you have not seen him to advantage, in that black suit, but in his ordinary clothes I should certainly take him, if I had not seen him before, to be a young lieutenant freshly come out to join."

"Did you know the father?"

"No, I was not here at that time; but the mother was a lady, every inch. It is strange that neither of them should have friends in England. It may be that she preferred to earn her living here, and be altogether independent."

"She had a pension, hadn't she?"

"A small one, but she really earned her living by teaching. She gave lessons to the ladies in English, French, and music, and had classes for young boys and girls. I once asked her if she did not intend to go back and settle in England, and she said 'Possibly, some day.'

"I fancy that there must have been some mystery about the affair–what, I can't say; but at any rate, we may take it that such a woman would not have married a man who was not a gentleman."

"Certainly the boy looks a well-bred one," Captain Ewart said, "and I am sure that the Sirdar must have been taken with him. You don't know any more about his father than you have told me?"

"Very little. Once, in talking with his wife, she told me that her husband had been in a commercial house, in Alexandria, for a year; but the place was burned down at the time of the bombardment. Being thus out of harness, he became an assistant to one of the army contractors and, when things settled down at Cairo, obtained a berth as interpreter, with the temporary rank of captain, on Hicks Pasha's staff, as he also spoke Arabic fluently. I can tell you no more about him than that, as I never saw him; though no doubt he came here with his wife, when her account was opened.

"I was interested in her. I looked up the old books, and found that two hundred pounds was paid into her account, before he left. I may say that she steadily increased that amount, ever since; but a few years ago she had the sum then standing transferred to the boy's name, telling me frankly, at the time, that she did so to save trouble, in case anything happened to her. I fancy, from what she said, that for the last year or two she had been going downhill. I had a chat with her, the last time she came in. She told me that she had been consumptive, and that it was for the sake of her health they came out here."

"That accounts for it, Murray. By the date, they were probably only married a year or so before they came out; and a man who loved a young wife, and saw no other way of saving her, would throw up any berth at home, in order to give her the benefit of a warm climate. Still, it is a little curious that, if he had only been out here a year or so before Hicks started, he should have learned Arabic sufficiently well to get a post as interpreter. I have been in the country about three years, and can get on fairly well with the natives, in matters concerning my own work; but I certainly could not act as general interpreter.

"Well, I am glad to have heard this, for you know the sort of men interpreters generally are. From the lad's appearance and manner, there is no shadow of doubt that his mother was a lady. I thought it more than probable that she had married beneath her, and that her husband was of the ordinary interpreter class. Now, from what you have said, I see that it is probable he came of a much better family. Well, you may be sure that I shall do what I can for the lad."

Gregory joined him, as he left the bank.

"I think, Hilliard, we had best go to the tailor, first. His shop is not far from here. As you want to get your things in three days, it is as well to have that matter settled, at once."

The two suits, each consisting of khaki tunic, breeches, and putties, were ordered.

"You had better have breeches," he said. "It is likely you will have to ride, and knickerbockers look baggy."

This done, they went to Shepherd's Hotel.

"Sit down in the verandah," Captain Ewart said, "until I get rid of my regimentals. Even a khaki tunic is not an admirable garment, when one wants to be cool and comfortable."

In a few minutes he came down again, in a light tweed suit; and, seating himself in another lounging chair, two cooling drinks were brought in; then he said:

"Now we will talk about your outfit, and what you had best take up. Of course, you have got light underclothing, so you need not bother about that. You want ankle boots–and high ones–to keep

out the sand. You had better take a couple of pairs of slippers, they are of immense comfort at the end of the day; also a light cap, to slip on when you are going from one tent to another, after dark. A helmet is a good thing in many ways, but it is cumbrous; and if there are four or five men in a tent, and they all take off their helmets, it is difficult to know where to stow them away.

"Most likely you will get a tent at Dongola, but you can't always reckon upon that, and you may find it very useful to have a light ***tente d'abri*** made. It should have a fly, which is useful in two ways. In the first place, it adds to the height and so enlarges the space inside; and in the next place, you can tie it up in the daytime, and allow whatever air there is to pass through. Then, with a blanket thrown over the top, you will find it cooler than a regimental tent.

"Of course, you will want a sword and a revolver, with a case and belt. Get the regulation size, and a hundred rounds of cartridges; you are not likely ever to use a quarter of that number, but they will come in for practice.

"Now, as to food. Of course you get beef, biscuit, or bread, and there is a certain amount of tea, but nothing like enough for a thirsty climate, especially when–which is sometimes the case–the water is so bad that it is not safe to drink, unless it has been boiled; so you had better take up four or five pounds of tea."

"I don't take sugar, sir."

"All the better. There is no better drink than tea, poured out and left to cool, and drunk without sugar. You might take a dozen tins of preserved milk, as many of condensed cocoa and milk, and a couple of dozen pots of jam. Of course, you could not take all these things on if you were likely to move, but you may be at Dongola some time, before there is another advance, and you may as well make yourself as comfortable as you can; and if, as is probable, you cannot take the pots up with you, you can hand them over to those who are left behind. You will have no trouble in getting a fair-sized case taken up, as there will be water carriage nearly all the way.

"A good many fellows have aerated waters sent up, but hot soda water is by no means a desirable drink–not to be compared with tea kept in porous jars; so I should not advise you to bother about it. You will want a water bottle. Get the largest you can find. It is astonishing how much water a fellow can get down, in a long day's march.

"Oh! As to your boots, get the uppers as light as you can–the lighter the better; but you must have strong soles–there are rocks in some places, and they cut the soles to pieces, in no time. The sand is bad enough. Your foot sinks in it, and it seems to have a sort of sucking action, and very often takes the sole right off in a very short time.

"I suppose you smoke?"

"Cigarettes, sir."

"I should advise you to get a pipe, in addition, or rather two or three of them. If they get broken, or lost in the sand, there is no replacing them; and if you don't take to them, yourself, you will find them the most welcome present you can give, to a man who has lost his.

"I should advise you to get a lens. You don't want a valuable one, but the larger the better, and the cheapest that you can buy; it will be quite as good as the best, to use as a burning glass. Matches are precious things out there and, with a burning glass, you will only have to draw upon your stock in the evening.

"Now, do you ride? Because all the white officers with the Egyptian troops do so."

"I am sorry to say that I don't, sir. I have ridden donkeys, but anyone can sit upon a donkey."

"Yes; that won't help you much. Then I should advise you to use all the time that you can spare, after ordering your outfit, in riding. No doubt you could hire a horse."

"Yes; there is no difficulty about that."

"Well, if you will hire one, and come round here at six o'clock tomorrow morning, I will ride out for a couple of hours with you, and give you your first lesson. I can borrow a horse from one of the staff. If you once get to sit your horse, in a workman-like fashion, and to carry yourself well, you

will soon pick up the rest; and if you go out, morning and evening, for three hours each time, you won't be quite abroad, when you start to keep up with a column of men on foot.

"As to a horse, it would be hardly worth your while to bother about taking one with you. You will be able to pick one up at Dongola. I hear that fugitives are constantly coming in there, and some of them are sure to be mounted. However, you had better take up a saddle and bridle with you. You might as well get an Egyptian one; in the first place because it is a good deal cheaper, and in the second because our English saddles are made for bigger horses. You need not mind much about the appearance of your animal. Anything will do for riding about at Dongola, and learning to keep your seat. In the first fight you have with Dervish horsemen, there are sure to be some riderless horses, and you may then get a good one, for a pound or two, from some Tommy who has captured one."

"I am sure I am immensely obliged to you, Captain Ewart. That will indeed be an advantage to me."

On leaving the hotel Gregory at once made all his purchases, so as to get them off his mind; and then arranged for the horse in the morning. Then he went home, and told the old servant the change that had taken place in his position.

"And now, what about yourself, what would you like to do?"

"I am too old to go up with you, and cook for you."

"Yes, indeed," he laughed; "we shall be doing long marches. But it is not your age, so much. As an officer, it would be impossible for me to have a female servant. Besides, you want quiet and rest. I have been round to the landlord, to tell him that I am going away, and to pay him a month's rent, instead of notice. I should think the best way would be for you to take a large room for yourself, or two rooms not so large–one of them for you to live in, and the other to store everything there is here. I know that you will look after them, and keep them well. Of course, you will pick out all the things that you can use in your room. It will be very lonely for you, living all by yourself, but you know numbers of people here; and you might engage a girl to stay with you, for some small wages and her food. Now, you must think over what your food and hers will cost, and the rent. Of course, I want you to live comfortably; you have always been a friend rather than a servant, and my mother had the greatest trust in you."

"You are very good, Master Gregory. While you have been away, today, I have been thinking over what I should do, when you went away. I have a friend who comes in, once a week, with fruit and vegetables. Last year, you know, I went out with her and stayed a day. She has two boys who work in the garden, and a girl. She came in today, and I said to her:

"'My young master is going away to the Soudan. What do you say to my coming and living with you, when he has gone? I can cook, and do all about the house, and help a little in the garden; and I have saved enough money to pay for my share of food.'

"She said, 'I should like that, very well. You could help the boys, in the field.'

"So we agreed that, if you were willing, I should go. I thought of the furniture; but if you do not come back here to live, it would be no use to keep the chairs, and tables, and beds, and things. We can put all Missy's things, and everything you like to keep, into a great box, and I could take them with me; or you could have them placed with some honest man, who would only charge very little, for storage."

"Well, I do think that would be a good plan, if you like these people. It would be far better than living by yourself. However, of course I shall pay for your board, and I shall leave money with you; so that, if you are not comfortable there, you can do as I said, take a room here.

"I think you are right about the furniture. How would you sell it?"

"There are plenty of Greek shops. They would buy it all. They would not give as much as you gave for it. Most of them are great rascals."

"We cannot help that," he said. "I should have to sell them when I come back and, at any rate, we save the rent for housing them. They are not worth much. You may take anything you like, a

comfortable chair and a bed, some cooking things, and so on, and sell the rest for anything you can get, after I have gone. I will pack my dear mother's things, this evening."

For the next two days, Gregory almost lived on horseback; arranging, with the man from whom he hired the animals, that he should change them three times a day. He laid aside his black clothes, and took to a white flannel suit, with a black ribbon round his straw hat; as deep mourning would be terribly hot, and altogether unsuited for riding.

"You will do, lad," Captain Ewart said to him, after giving him his first lesson. "Your fencing has done much for you, and has given you an easy poise of body and head. Always remember that it is upon balancing the body that you should depend for your seat; although, of course, the grip of the knees does a good deal. Also remember, always, to keep your feet straight; nothing is so awkward as turned-out toes. Besides, in that position, if the horse starts you are very likely to dig your spurs into him.

"Hold the reins firmly, but don't pull at his head. Give him enough scope to toss his head if he wants to, but be in readiness to tighten the reins in an instant, if necessary."

Each day, Gregory returned home so stiff, and tired, that he could scarcely crawl along. Still, he felt that he had made a good deal of progress; and that, when he got up to Dongola, he would be able to mount and ride out without exciting derision. On the morning of the day on which he was to start, he went to say goodbye to Mr. Murray.

"Have you everything ready, Hilliard?" the banker asked.

"Yes, sir. The uniform and the tent are both ready. I have a cork bed, and waterproof sheet to lay under it; and, I think, everything that I can possibly require. I am to meet Captain Ewart at the railway, this afternoon at five o'clock. The train starts at half past.

"I will draw another twenty-five pounds, sir. I have not spent more than half what I had, but I must leave some money with our old servant. I shall have to buy a horse, too, when I get up to Dongola, and I may have other expenses, that I cannot foresee."

"I think that is a wise plan," the banker said. "It is always well to have money with you, for no one can say what may happen. Your horse may get shot or founder, and you may have to buy another. Well, I wish you every luck, lad, and a safe return."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Murray! All this good fortune has come to me, entirely through your kindness. I cannot say how grateful I feel to you."

Chapter 5: Southward

At the hour named, Gregory met Captain Ewart at the station. He was now dressed in uniform, and carried a revolver in his waist belt, and a sword in its case. His luggage was not extensive. He had one large bundle; it contained a roll-up cork bed, in a waterproof casing. At one end was a loose bag; which contained a spare suit of clothes, three flannel shirts, and his underclothing. This formed the pillow. A blanket and a waterproof sheet were rolled up with it. In a small sack was the ***tente d'abri***, made of waterproof sheeting, with its two little poles. It only weighed some fifteen pounds. His only other luggage consisted of a large case, with six bottles of brandy, and the provisions he had been recommended to take.

"Is that all your kit?" Captain Ewart said, as he joined him.

"Yes, sir. I hope you don't think it is too much."

"No; I think it is very moderate, though if you move forward, you will not be able to take the case with you, The others are light enough, and you can always get a native boy to carry them. Of course, you have your pass?"

"Yes, sir. I received it yesterday, when I went to headquarters for the letter to General Hunter."

"Then we may as well take our places, at once. We have nearly an hour before the train starts; but it is worth waiting, in order to get two seats next the window, on the river side. We need not sit there till the train starts, if we put our traps in to keep our places. I know four or five other officers coming up, so we will spread our things about, and keep the whole carriage to ourselves, if we can."

In an hour, the train started. Every place was occupied. Ewart had spoken to his friends, as they arrived, and they had all taken places in the same compartment. The journey lasted forty hours, and Gregory admitted that the description Captain Ewart had given him, of the dust, was by no means exaggerated. He had brought, as had been suggested, a water skin and a porous earthenware bottle; together with a roll of cotton-wool to serve as a stopper to the latter, to keep out the dust. In a tightly fitting handbag he had an ample supply of food for three days. Along the opening of this he had pasted a strip of paper.

"That will do very well for your first meal, Hilliard, but it will be of no good afterwards."

"I have prepared for that," Gregory said. "I have bought a gum bottle, and as I have a newspaper in my pocket, I can seal it up after each meal."

"By Jove, that is a good idea, one I never thought of!"

"The gum will be quite sufficient for us all, up to Assouan. I have two more bottles in my box. That should be sufficient to last me for a long time, when I am in the desert; and as it won't take half a minute to put a fresh paper on, after each meal, I shall have the satisfaction of eating my food without its being mixed with the dust."

There was a general chorus of approval, and all declared that they would search every shop in Assouan, and endeavour to find gum.

"Paste will do as well," Ewart said, "and as we can always get flour, we shall be able to defy the dust fiend as far as our food goes.

"I certainly did not expect that old campaigners would learn a lesson from you, Hilliard, as soon as you started."

"It was just an idea that occurred to me," Gregory said.

The gum bottle was handed round, and although nothing could be done for those who had brought their provisions in hampers, three of them who had, like Gregory, put their food in bags, were able to seal them up tightly.

It was now May, and the heat was becoming intolerable, especially as the windows were closed to keep out the dust. In spite of this, however, it found its way in. It settled everywhere. Clothes and

hair became white with it. It worked its way down the neck, where the perspiration changed it into mud. It covered the face, as if with a cake of flour.

At first Gregory attempted to brush it off his clothes, as it settled upon them, but he soon found that there was no advantage in this. So he sat quietly in his corner and, like the rest, looked like a dirty white statue. There were occasional stops, when they all got out, shook themselves, and took a few mouthfuls of fresh air.

Gregory's plan, for keeping out the dust from the food, turned out a great success; and the meals were eaten in the open air, during the stoppages.

On arriving at Assouan, they all went to the transport department, to get their passes for the journey up the Nile, as far as Wady Halfa. The next step was to go down to the river for a swim and, by dint of shaking and beating, to get rid of the accumulated dust.

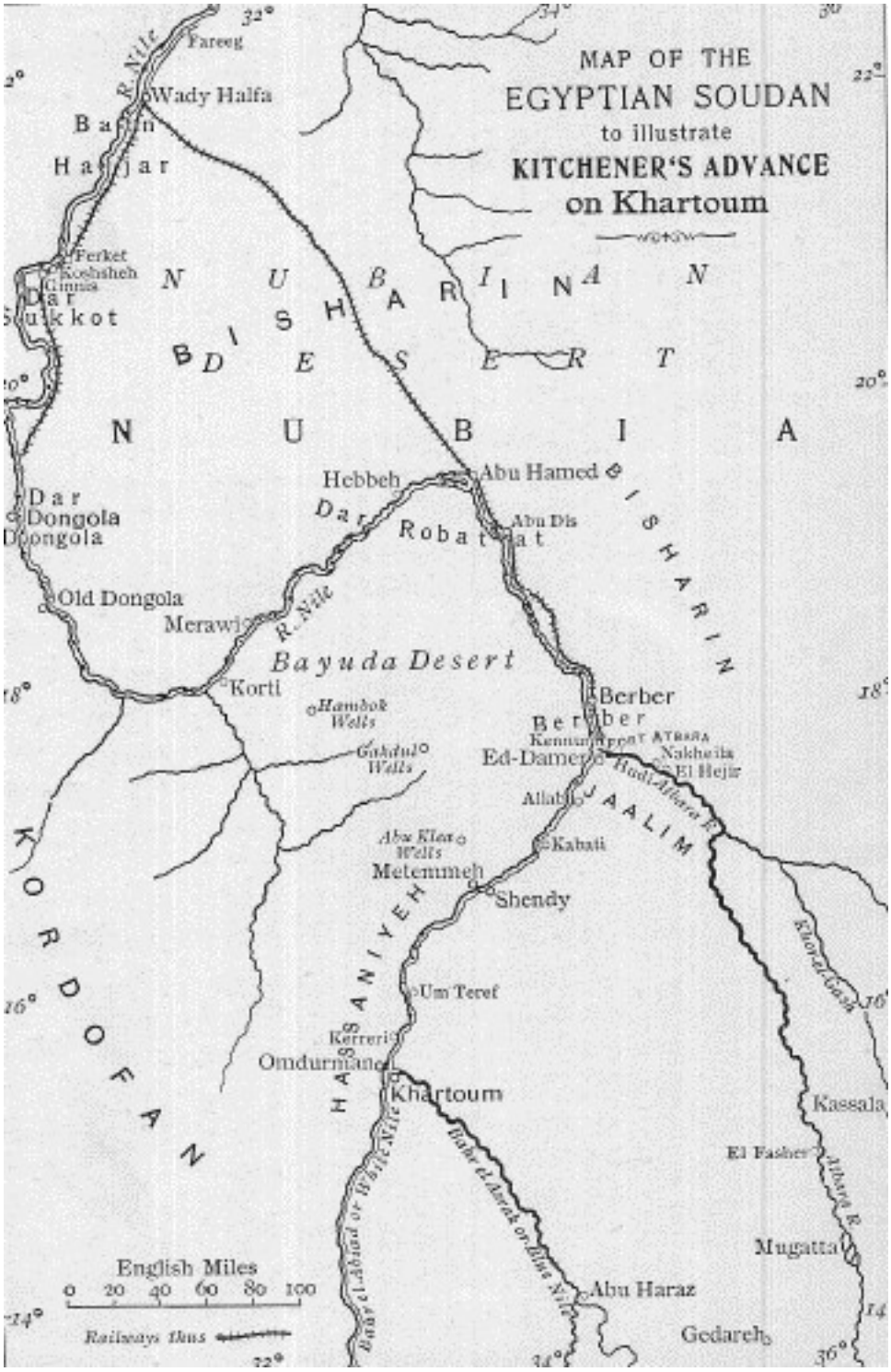
Assouan was not a pleasant place to linger in and, as soon as they had completed their purchases, Captain Ewart and Gregory climbed on to the loaded railway train, and were carried by the short line to the spot where, above the cataract, the steamer that was to carry them was lying. She was to tow up a large barge, and two native craft. They took their places in the steamer, with a number of other officers–some newcomers from England, others men who had been down to Cairo, to recruit. They belonged to all branches of the service, and included half a dozen of the medical staff, three of the transport corps, gunners, engineers, cavalry, and infantry. The barges were deep in the water, with their cargoes of stores of all kinds, and rails and sleepers for the railway, and the steamer was also deeply loaded.

The passage was a delightful one, to Gregory. Everything was new to him. The cheery talk and jokes of the officers, the graver discussion of the work before them, the calculations as to time and distance, the stories told of what had taken place during the previous campaign, by those who shared in it, were all so different from anything he had ever before experienced, that the hours passed almost unnoticed. It was glorious to think that, in whatever humble capacity, he was yet one of the band who were on their way up to meet the hordes of the Khalifa, to rescue the Soudan from the tyranny under which it had groaned, to avenge Gordon and Hicks and the gallant men who had died with them!

Occasionally, Captain Ewart came up and talked to him, but he was well content to sit on one of the bales, and listen to the conversation without joining in it. In another couple of years he, too, would have had his experiences, and would be able to take his part. At present, he preferred to be a listener.

The distance to Wady Halfa was some three hundred miles; but the current was strong, and the steamer could not tow the boats more than five miles an hour, against it. It was sixty hours, from the start, before they arrived.

Gregory was astonished at the stir and life in the place. Great numbers of native labourers were at work, unloading barges and native craft; and a line of railway ran down to the wharves, where the work of loading the trucks went on briskly. Smoke pouring out from many chimneys, and the clang of hammers, told that the railway engineering work was in full swing. Vast piles of boxes, cases, and bales were accumulated on the wharf, and showed that there would be no loss of time in pushing forward supplies to Abu Hamed, as soon as the railway was completed to that point.



Wady Halfa had been the starting point of a railway, commenced years before. A few miles have been constructed, and several buildings erected for the functionaries, military and civil; but Gordon, when Governor of the Soudan, had refused to allow the province to be saddled with the expenses of the construction, or to undertake the responsibility of carrying it out.

In 1884 there was some renewal of work and, had Gordon been rescued, and Khartoum permanently occupied, the line would no doubt have been carried on; but with the retirement of the British troops, work ceased, and the great stores of material that had been gathered there remained, for years, half covered with the sand. In any other climate this would have been destructive, but in

the dry air of Upper Egypt they remained almost uninjured, and proved very useful, when the work was again taken up.

It was a wonderful undertaking, for along the two hundred and thirty-four miles of desert, food, water, and every necessary had to be carried, together with all materials for its construction. Not only had an army of workmen to be fed, but a body of troops to guard them; for Abu Hamed, at the other end of the line, for which they were making, was occupied by a large body of Dervishes; who might, at any moment, swoop down across the plain.

Had the Sirdar had the resources of England at his back, the work would have been easier, for he could have ordered from home new engines, and plant of every description; but it was an Egyptian work, and had to be done in the cheapest possible way. Old engines had to be patched up, and makeshifts of all kinds employed. Fortunately he had, in the chief engineer of the line, a man whose energy, determination, and resource were equal to his own. Major Girouard was a young officer of the Royal Engineers and, like all white officers in the Egyptian service, held the rank of major. He was a Canadian by birth, and proved, in every respect, equal to the onerous and responsible work to which he was appointed.

However, labour was cheap, and railway battalions were raised among the Egyptian peasants, their pay being the same as that of the soldiers. Strong, hearty, and accustomed to labour and a scanty diet, no men could have been more fitted for the work. They preferred it to soldiering; for although, as they had already shown, and were still further to prove, the Egyptian can fight, and fight bravely; he is, by nature, peaceable, and prefers work, however hard. In addition to these battalions, natives of the country and of the Soudan, fugitives from ruined villages and desolated plains, were largely employed.

The line had now been carried three-quarters of the distance to Abu Hamed, which was still in the hands of the Dervishes. It had been constructed with extraordinary rapidity, for the ground was so level that only occasional cuttings were needed. The organization of labour was perfect. The men were divided into gangs, each under a head man, and each having its own special work to do. There were the men who unloaded the trucks, the labourers who did the earth work, and the more skilled hands who levelled it. As fast as the trucks were emptied, gangs of men carried the sleepers forward, and laid them down roughly in position; others followed, and corrected the distance between each. The rails were then brought along and laid down, with the fish plates, in the proper places; men put these on, and boys screwed up the nuts. Then plate layers followed and lined the rails accurately; and, when this was done, sand was thrown in and packed down between the sleepers.

By this division of labour, the line was pushed on from one to two miles a day, the camp moving forward with the line. Six tank trucks brought up the water for the use of the labourers, daily, and everything worked with as much regularity as in a great factory at home. Troops of friendly tribesmen, in our pay, scoured the country and watched the wells along the road, farther to the east, so as to prevent any bands of Dervishes from dashing suddenly down upon the workers.

At Wady Halfa, Captain Ewart and two or three other officers left the steamer, to proceed up the line. Gregory was very sorry to lose him.

"I cannot tell you, Captain Ewart," he said, "how deeply grateful I feel to you, for the immense kindness you have shown me. I don't know what I should have done, had I been left without your advice and assistance in getting my outfit, and making my arrangements to come up here."

"My dear lad," the latter said, "don't say anything more. In any case, I should naturally be glad to do what I could, for the son of a man who died fighting in the same cause as we are now engaged in. But in your case it has been a pleasure, for I am sure you will do credit to yourself, and to the mother who has taken such pains in preparing you for the work you are going to do, and in fitting you for the position that you now occupy."

As the officers who had come up with them in the train from Cairo were all going on, and had been told by Ewart something of Gregory's story, they had aided that officer in making Gregory feel

at home in his new circumstances; and in the two days they had been on board the boat, he had made the acquaintance of several others.

The river railway had now been carried from Wady Halfa to Kerma, above the third cataract. The heavy stores were towed up by steamers and native craft. Most of the engines and trucks had been transferred to the desert line; but a few were still retained, to carry up troops if necessary, and aid the craft in accumulating stores.

One of these trains started a few hours after the arrival of the steamer at Wady Halfa. Gregory, with the officers going up, occupied two horse boxes. Several of them had been engaged in the last campaign, and pointed out the places of interest.

At Sarras, some thirty miles up the road, there had been a fight on the 29th of April, 1887; when the Dervish host, advancing strong in the belief that they could carry all before them down to the sea, were defeated by the Egyptian force under the Sirdar and General Chermside.

The next stop of the train was at Akasheh. This had been a very important station, before the last advance, as all the stores had been accumulated here when the army advanced. Here had been a strongly entrenched camp, for the Dervishes were in force, fifteen miles away, at Ferket.

"It was a busy time we had here," said one of the officers, who had taken a part in the expedition. "A fortnight before, we had no idea that an early move was contemplated; and indeed, it was only on the 14th of March that the excitement began. That day, Kitchener received a telegram ordering an immediate advance on Dongola. We had expected it would take place soon; but there is no doubt that the sudden order was the result of an arrangement, on the part of our government with Italy, that we should relieve her from the pressure of the Dervishes round Kassala by effecting a diversion, and obliging the enemy to send a large force down to Dongola to resist our advance.

"It was a busy time. The Sirdar came up to Wady Halfa, and the Egyptian troops were divided between that place, Sarras, and Akasheh. The 9th Soudanese were marched up from Suakim, and they did the distance to the Nile (one hundred and twenty miles) in four days. That was something like marching.

"Well, you saw Wady Halfa. For a month, this place was quite as busy. Now, its glories are gone. Two or three huts for the railway men, and the shelters for a company of Egyptians, represent the whole camp."

As they neared Ferket the officer said:

"There was a sharp fight out there on the desert. A large body of Dervishes advanced, from Ferket. They were seen to leave by a cavalry patrol. As soon as the patrol reached camp, all the available horse, two hundred and forty in number, started under Major Murdoch. Four miles out, they came in sight of three hundred mounted Dervishes, with a thousand spearmen on foot.

"The ground was rough, and unfavourable for a cavalry charge; so the cavalry retired to a valley, between two hills, in order to get better ground. While they were doing so, however, the Dervishes charged down upon them. Murdoch rode at them at once, and there was a hand-to-hand fight that lasted for twenty minutes. Then the enemy turned, and galloped off to the shelter of the spearmen. The troopers dismounted and opened fire; and, on a regiment of Soudanese coming up, the enemy drew off.

"Eighteen of the Dervishes were killed, and eighty wounded. Our loss was very slight; but the fight was a most satisfactory one, for it showed that the Egyptian cavalry had, now, sufficient confidence in themselves to face the Baggara.

"Headquarters came up to Akasheh on the 1st of June. The spies had kept the Intelligence Department well informed as to the state of things at Ferket. It was known that three thousand troops were there, led by fifty-seven Emirs. The ground was carefully reconnoitred, and all preparation made for an attack. It was certain that the Dervishes also had spies, among the camel drivers and camp followers, but the Sirdar kept his intentions secret, and on the evening of June 5th it was not known to any, save three or four of the principal officers, that he intended to attack on the following morning.

It was because he was anxious to effect a complete surprise that he did not even bring up the North Staffordshires.

"There were two roads to Ferket–one by the river, the other through the desert. The river column was the strongest, and consisted of an infantry division, with two field batteries and two Maxims. The total strength of the desert column, consisting of the cavalry brigade, camel corps, a regiment of infantry, a battery of horse artillery, and two Maxims–in all, two thousand one hundred men–were to make a detour, and come down upon the Nile to the south of Ferket, thereby cutting off the retreat of the enemy.

"Carrying two days' rations, the troops started late in the afternoon of the 6th, and halted at nine in the evening, three miles from Ferket. At half-past two they moved forward again, marching quietly and silently; and, at half-past four, deployed into line close to the enemy's position. A few minutes later the alarm was given; and the Dervishes, leaping to arms, discovered this formidable force in front of them; and at the same time found that their retreat was cut off, by another large body of troops in their rear; while, on the opposite bank of the river, was a force of our Arab allies.

"Though they must have seen that their position was hopeless, the Dervishes showed no signs of fear. They fought with the desperation of rats in a trap. The Egyptians advanced with steady volleys. The Baggara horsemen attacked them furiously, but were repulsed with heavy loss. There was hand-to-hand fighting among their huts; and the second brigade carried, with the bayonet, that rough hill that you see over there.

"It was all over, by seven o'clock. Our loss was only twenty killed, and eighty wounded. About one thousand of the Dervishes were killed, including their chief Emir and some forty of the others, while five hundred were taken prisoners. It was a great victory, and a very important one; but it can hardly be said that it was glorious, as we outnumbered them by three to one. Still, it was a heavy blow to the Dervishes, and the fact that the Khalifa was obliged to send troops down to the Nile, to check an advance that had proved so formidable, must have greatly relieved the pressure on the Italians at Kassala.

"There was a pause, here. It was certain that we should have to meet a much stronger force before we got to Dongola. Well as the Egyptian troops had fought, it was thought advisable to give them a stronger backing.

"The heat was now tremendous, and cholera had broken out. We moved to Koshyeh, and there encamped. The only change we had was a terrific storm, which almost washed us away. In the middle of August, we managed to get the gunboats up through the cataract, and were in hopes of advancing, when another storm carried away twenty miles of the railway, which by this time had come up as far as the cataract."

At Ginnis, twenty miles from Ferket, they passed the ground where, on the 31st of December, 1885, on the retirement of General Wolseley's expedition, Generals Grenfel and Stevenson, with a force of Egyptian troops and three British regiments, encountered the Dervish army which the Khalifa had despatched under the Emir Nejumi, and defeated it. It was notable as being the first battle in which the newly raised Egyptian army met the Mahdists, and showed that, trained and disciplined by British officers, the Egyptian fellah was capable of standing against the Dervish of the desert.

From this point the railway left the Nile and, for thirty miles, crossed the desert. Another twenty miles, and they reached Fareeg.

"It was here," the officer said, "that the North Staffordshires came up and joined the Egyptians. The Dervishes had fallen back before we advanced, after a halt at Sadeah, which we sha'n't see, as the railway cuts across, to Abu Fetmeh. We bivouacked five miles from their camp, and turned out at three next morning. The orders were passed by mouth, and we got off as silently as an army of ghosts.

"I shall never forget our disgust when a small cavalry force, sent on ahead to reconnoitre, reported that the Dervishes had abandoned the place during the night, and had crossed the river in native boats. It was a very clever move, at any rate, on the part of fellows who did not want to fight.

There were we facing them, with our whole infantry and cavalry useless, and we had nothing available to damage the enemy except our artillery and the gunboats.

"These opened fire, and the Dervishes replied heavily. They had earthworks, but the boats kept on, pluckily, till they got to a narrow point in the stream; when a couple of guns, which had hitherto been hidden, opened upon them at close range; while a strong force of Dervish infantry poured in such a hot fire that the boats had to fall back.

"After our field guns had peppered the enemy for a bit, the gunboats tried again, but the fire was too hot for them, and the leading boat had to retire.

"Things did not look very bright, till nine o'clock; when we found that, at one point, the river was fordable to a small island, opposite the enemy's lines. Four batteries, and the Maxims, at once moved over, with two companies of Soudanese, and opened fire. The distance across was but six hundred yards, and the fire was tremendous–shell, shrapnel, and rockets–while the Soudanese fired volleys, and the Maxims maintained a shower of bullets.

"It seemed that nothing could stand against it, but the Dervishes stuck to their guns with great pluck. However, their fire was so far kept down, that the three gunboats succeeded in forcing their way up; and, passing the Dervish works, sank a steamer and a number of native boats.

"The Dervishes now began to give way, and the gunboats steamed up the river, making for Dongola. The Dervishes, as soon as they had gone, reopened fire, and the duel continued all day; but the great mass of the enemy soon left, and also made their way towards Dongola.

"It was awfully annoying being obliged to remain inactive, on our side, and it was especially hard for the cavalry; who, if they could have got over, would have been able to cut up and disperse the enemy.

"The next morning the Dervishes were all gone, and that was practically the end of the fighting. The gunboats went up and shelled Dongola; and when we got there, two days later, the Dervishes had had enough of it. Of course, there was a little fighting, but it was the effort of a party of fanatics, rather than of an enemy who considered resistance possible.

"We were greeted with enthusiasm by the unfortunate inhabitants, who had been subject to the Dervish tyranny. As a whole, however, they had not been badly treated here, and had been allowed to continue to cultivate their land, subject only to about the same taxation as they had paid to Egypt. Of course, from what they have done elsewhere, the comparative mildness of the conduct of the Dervishes was not due to any feeling of mercy, but to policy. As the most advanced position, with the exception of scattered and temporary posts lower down the river, it was necessary that there should be food for the considerable body of tribesmen encamped at Dongola; especially as an army invading Egypt would provide itself, there, with stores for the journey. It was therefore good policy to encourage the cultivators of land to stay there."

"Thank you very much!" Gregory said, when the officer had concluded his sketch of the previous campaign. "Of course, I heard that we had beaten the Khalifa's men, and had taken Dongola, but the papers at Cairo gave no details. The Staffordshire regiment went down, directly the place was taken, did they not?"

"Yes. They had suffered heavily from cholera; and as there was now no fear that the Egyptians and Soudanese would prove unequal to withstanding a Dervish rush, there was no necessity for keeping them here."

At Abu Fetmeh they left the train, and embarked in a steamer. Of the party that had left Assouan, only four or five remained. The rest had been dropped at other stations on the road.

The boat stopped but a few hours at Dongola, which had for a time been the headquarters of the advanced force. Great changes had been made, since the place was captured from the Dervishes. At that time the population had been reduced to a handful, and the natives who remained tilled but enough ground for their own necessities; for they knew that, at any time, a Dervish force might come

along and sweep everything clear. But with the advent of the British, the fugitives who had scattered among the villages along the river soon poured in.

Numbers of Greek traders arrived, with camels and goods, and the town assumed an aspect of life and business. The General established a court of justice, and appointed authorities for the proper regulation of affairs; and by the time Gregory came up, the town was showing signs of renewed prosperity.

But the steamer stopped at Dongola only to land stores needed for the regiment stationed there. The headquarters had, months before, been moved to Merawi, some eighty miles higher up, situated at the foot of the fourth cataract.

Although he had enjoyed the journey, Gregory was glad when the steamer drew up against a newly constructed wharf at Merawi. Now he was to begin his duties, whatever they might be.

At the wharf were a large number of Soudanese soldiers. A telegram, from the last station they touched at, had given notice of the hour at which the boat would arrive; and a battalion of native troops had marched down, to assist in unloading the stores. A white officer had come down with them, to superintend the operation, and the other officers at once went on shore to speak to him.

Gregory had got all his traps together and, as the Soudanese poured on board, he thought it better to remain with them; as, if his belongings once got scattered, there would be little chance of his being able to collect them again. After a short time, he went up to one of the native officers.

"This is my first visit here," he said in Arabic, "and as I have not brought up a servant with me, I do not like to leave my baggage here, while I go and report myself to General Hunter. Will you kindly tell me what I had better do?"

"Certainly. I will place one of my corporals in charge of your things. It would be as well to get them ashore at once, as we shall want the decks clear, in order that the men may work freely in getting the stores up from below. The corporal will see that your baggage is carried to the bank, to a spot where it will be out of the way, and will remain with it until you know where it is to be taken."

Thanking him for his civility, Gregory went on shore. The officer who had told him the story of the campaign was still talking, to the Major who had come down with the blacks. As Gregory came up, he said:

"I wondered what had become of you, Hilliard. I have been telling Major Sidney that a young lieutenant had come up, to report himself to the General for service."

"I am glad to see you, sir," the Major said, holding out his hand. "Every additional white officer is a material gain, and I have no doubt that General Hunter will find plenty for you to do. I hear you can speak the Negro language, as well as Arabic. That will be specially useful here, for the natives are principally Negro, and speak very little Arabic.

"How about your baggage?"

"One of the native officers has undertaken to get it ashore, and to put a corporal in charge of it, until I know where it is to go."

"Well, Fladgate, as you are going to the General's, perhaps you will take Mr. Hilliard with you, and introduce him."

"With pleasure.

"Now, Mr. Hilliard, let us be off, at once. The sun is getting hot, and the sooner we are under shelter, the better."

Ten minutes' walk took them to the house formerly occupied by the Egyptian Governor of the town, where General Hunter now had his headquarters. The General, who was a brevet colonel in the British Army, had joined the Egyptian Army in 1888. He had, as a captain in the Lancashire regiment, taken part in the Nile Expedition, 1884-85; had been severely wounded at the battle of Ginnis; and again at Toski, where he commanded a brigade. He was still a comparatively young man. He had a broad forehead, and an intellectual face, that might have betokened a student rather than

a soldier; but he was celebrated, in the army, for his personal courage and disregard of danger, and was adored by his black soldiers.

He rose from the table at which he was sitting, as Captain Fladgate came in.

"I am glad to see you back again," he said. "I hope you have quite shaken off the fever?"

"Quite, General. I feel thoroughly fit for work again. Allow me to present to you Mr. Hilliard, who has just received a commission as lieutenant in the Egyptian Army. He has a letter from the Sirdar, to you."

"Well, I will not detain you now, Captain Fladgate. You will find your former quarters in readiness for you. Dinner at the usual time; then you shall tell me the news of Cairo.

"Now, Mr. Hilliard," and he turned to Gregory, "pray take a seat. This is your first experience in soldiering, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

"I think you are the first white officer who has been appointed, who has not had experience in our own army first. You have not been appointed to any particular battalion, have you?"

"No, sir. I think I have come out to make myself generally useful. These are the letters that I was to hand to you–one is from the Sirdar himself, the other is from his chief of the staff, and this letter is from Captain Ewart."

The General read the Sirdar's letter first. He then opened that from the chief of the staff. This was the more bulky of the two, and contained several enclosures.

"Ah! this relates to you," the General said as, after glancing over the two official despatches, he read through the letter of Captain Ewart, who was a personal friend of his.

The latter had given a full account of Gregory's history, and said that the Sirdar had especially asked him to put him in the way of things; that he had seen a great deal of him on the journey up, and was very greatly pleased with him.

"The lad is a perfect gentleman," he said, "which is certainly astonishing, he being a product of Cairo. I consider him in all respects–except, of course, a classical education–fully equal to the average young officer, on first joining. He is very modest and unassuming; and will, I feel sure, perform with credit any work that you may give him to do."

"I see," he said, laying it down, "you have only joined the army temporarily, and with a special purpose, and I am told to utilize your services as I think best. You have a perfect knowledge of Arabic, and of the Negro dialect. That will be very useful, for though we all speak Arabic, few speak the Negro language, which is more commonly used here.

"Your father fell with Hicks Pasha, I am told, and you have joined us with the object of obtaining news as to the manner in which he met his death?"

"That is so, sir. It was always my mother's wish that I should, when I was old enough, come up to the Soudan to make enquiries. As my father was a good Arabic scholar, my mother always entertained a faint hope that he might have escaped; especially as we know that a good many of the Egyptian soldiers were not killed, but were taken prisoners, and made to serve in the Mahdi's army."

"Yes, there are several of them among the Khalifa's artillerymen, but I am very much afraid that none of the officers were spared. You see, they kept together in a body, and died fighting to the last."

"I have hardly any hopes myself, sir. Still, as my father was interpreter, he might not have been with the others, but in some other part of the square that was attacked."

"That is possible; but he was a white man, and in the heat of the battle I don't think that the Dervishes would have made any exception. You see, there were two correspondents with Hicks, and neither of them has ever been heard of; and they must, I should think, have joined in that last desperate charge of his.

"Well, for the present I must make you a sort of extra aide-de-camp, and what with one thing and another, I have no doubt that I shall find plenty for you to do. As such, you will of course be a

member of headquarters mess, and therefore escape the trouble of providing for yourself. You have not brought a servant up with you, I suppose?"

"No, sir. Captain Ewart, who most kindly advised me as to my outfit, said that, if I could find an intelligent native here, it would be better than taking a man from Cairo."

"Quite right; and the fellows one picks up at Cairo are generally lazy, and almost always dishonest. The men you get here may not know much, but are ready enough to learn; and, if well treated, will go through fire and water for their master.

"Go down to the stores, and tell the officer in charge there that I shall be glad if he will pick out two or three fellows, from whom you may choose a servant."

When Gregory had given his message, the officer said:

"You had better pick out one for yourself, Mr. Hilliard. Strength and willingness to work are the points I keep my eye upon; and, except for the foremen of the gangs, their intelligence does not interest me. You had better take a turn among the parties at work, and pick out a man for yourself."

Gregory was not long in making his choice. He selected a young fellow who, although evidently exerting himself to the utmost, was clearly incapable of doing his share in carrying the heavy bales and boxes, that were easily handled by older men. He had a pleasant face, and looked more intelligent than most of the others.

"To what tribe do you belong?" Gregory asked him.

"The Jaalin. I come from near Metemmeh."

"I want a servant. You do not seem to be strong enough for this work, but if you will be faithful, and do what I tell you, I will try you."

The young fellow's face lit up.

"I will be faithful, bey. It would be kind of you to take me. I am not at my full strength yet and, although I try my hardest, I cannot do as much as strong men, and then I am abused. I will be very faithful, and if you do not find me willing to do all that you tell me, you can send me back to work here."

"Well, come along with me, then."

He took him to the officer.

"I have chosen this man, sir. Can I take him away at once?"

"Certainly. He has been paid up to last night."

"Thank you very much! I will settle with him for today."

And, followed by the young tribesman, he went to the headquarters camp, near which an empty hut was assigned to him.

Chapter 6: Gregory Volunteers

The hut of which Gregory took possession was constructed of dry mud. The roof was of poles, on which were thickly laid boughs and palm leaves; and on these a layer of clay, a foot thick. An opening in the wall, eighteen inches square, served as a window. Near the door the floor was littered with rubbish of all kinds.

"What is your name?"

"Zaki."

"Well, Zaki, the first thing is to clear out all this rubbish, and sweep the floor as clean as you can. I am going down to the river to get my baggage up. Can you borrow a shovel, or something of that sort, from one of the natives here? Or, if he will sell it, buy one. I will pay when I return. It will always come in useful. If you cannot get a shovel, a hoe will do. Ah! I had better give you a dollar, the man might not trust you."

He then walked down to the river, and found the black corporal sitting tranquilly by the side of his baggage. The man stood up and saluted, and on Gregory saying that he had now a house, at once told off two soldiers to carry the things.

Arriving at the hut, he found Zaki hard at work, shovelling the rubbish through the doorway. Just as he came up, the boy brought down his tool, with a crash, upon a little brown creature that was scuttling away.

"What is that, Zaki?"

"That is a scorpion, bey; I have killed four of them."

"That is not at all pleasant," Gregory said. "There may be plenty of them, up among the boughs overhead."

Zaki nodded.

"Plenty of creatures," he said, "some snakes."

"Then we will smoke them out, before I go in. When you have got the rubbish out, make a fire in the middle, wet some leaves and things and put them on, and we will hang a blanket over the window and shut the door. I will moisten some powder and scatter it among the leaves, and the sulphur will help the smoke to bring them down."

This was done, the door closed and, as it did not fit at all tightly, the cracks were filled with some damp earth from the watercourse.

"What did you pay for the shovel, Zaki?"

"Half a dollar, bey. Here is the other half."

"Well, you had better go and buy some things for yourself. Tomorrow I will make other arrangements. Get a fire going out here. There is a sauce pan and a kettle, so you can boil some rice or fry some meat."

Gregory then went again to the officer who was acting as quartermaster.

"I have been speaking to the General," the latter said. "You will mess with the staff. The dinner hour is seven o'clock. I am sure you will soon feel at home."

Gregory now strolled through the camp. The troops were in little mud huts, of their own construction; as these, in the heat of the day, were much cooler than tents. The sun was getting low, and the Soudanese troops were all occupied in cooking, mending their clothes, sweeping the streets between the rows of huts, and other light duties. They seemed, to Gregory, as full of fun and life as a party of schoolboys–laughing, joking, and playing practical tricks on each other.

The physique of some of the regiments was splendid, the men averaging over six feet in height, and being splendidly built. Other regiments, recruited among different tribes, were not so tall, but their sturdy figures showed them to be capable of any effort they might be called upon to make.

One of the officers came out of his tent, as he passed.

"You are a new arrival, I think, sir?" he said. "We have so few white officers, here, that one spots a fresh face at once."

"Yes, I only arrived two or three hours ago. My name is Hilliard. I am not attached to any regiment; but, as I speak the languages well, General Hunter is going, so he said, to make me generally useful. I only received my commission a few days before leaving Cairo."

"Well, come in and have a soda and whisky. The heat out here is frightful. You can tell me the last news from Cairo, and when we are going to move."

"I shall be happy to come in and have a chat," Gregory said, "but I do not drink anything. I have been brought up in Cairo, and am accustomed to heat, and I find that drinking only makes one more thirsty."

"I believe it does," the other said, "especially when the liquid is almost as hot as one is, one's self. Will you sit down on that box? Chairs are luxuries that we do not indulge in here. Well, have you heard anything about a move?"

"Nothing; but the officers I have spoken to all seem to think that it will soon begin. A good many came up with me, to Wady Halfa and the stations on the river; and I heard that all who had sufficiently recovered were under orders to rejoin, very shortly."

"Yes, I suppose it won't be long. Of course we know nothing here, and I don't expect we shall, till the order comes for us to start. This is not the time of year when one expects to be on the move; and if we do go, it is pretty certain that it is because Kitchener has made up his mind for a dash forward. You see, if we take Abu Hamed and drive the Dervishes away, we can, at once, push the railway on to that place; and, as soon as it is done, the troops can be brought up and an advance made to Berber, if not farther, during the cool season–if you can ever call it a cool season, here."

"Is there any great force at Abu Hamed?"

"No; nothing that could stand against this for a moment. Their chief force, outside Omdurman, is at Metemmeh under Mahmud, the Khalifa's favourite son. You see, the Jaalin made fools of themselves. Instead of waiting until we could lend them a hand, they revolted as soon as we took Dongola, and the result was that Mahmud came down and pretty well wiped them out. They defended themselves stoutly, at Metemmeh, but had no chance against such a host as he brought with him. The town was taken, and its defenders, between two and three thousand fighting men, were all massacred, together with most of the women and children.

"By the accounts brought down to us, by men who got away, it must have been an even more horrible business than usual; and the Dervishes are past masters in the art of massacre. However, I think that their course is nearly up. Of late, a good many fugitives from Kordofan have arrived here, and they say that there will be a general revolt there, when they hear that we have given the Dervishes a heavy thrashing."

"And where do you think the great fight is likely to take place?" Gregory asked.

"Not this side of Metemmeh. Except at Abu Hamed, we hear of no other strong Dervish force between this and Omdurman. If Mahmud thinks himself strong enough, no doubt he will fight; but if he and the Khalifa know their business, he will fall back and, with the forces at Omdurman, fight one big battle. The two armies together will, from what we hear, amount to sixty or seventy thousand; and there is no doubt whatever that, with all their faults, the beggars can fight. It will be a tough affair, but I believe we shall have some British troops here to help, before the final advance. We can depend now on both the Soudanese and the Egyptians to fight hard, but there are not enough of them. The odds would be too heavy, and the Sirdar is not a man to risk failure. But with a couple of brigades of British infantry, there can be no doubt what the result will be; and I fancy that, if we beat them in one big fight, it will be all up with Mahdism.

"It is only because the poor beggars of tribesmen regard the Dervishes as invincible, that they have put up so long with their tyranny. But the rising of the Jaalin, and the news we get from Kordofan, show that the moment they hear the Dervishes are beaten, and Khartoum is in our hands, there will

be a general rising, and the Dervishes will be pretty well exterminated. We all hope that Mahmud won't fight, for if he does, and we beat him, the Khalifa and his lot may lose heart and retire before we get to Omdurman; and, once away, the tremendous business of trying to follow him will confront us. Here we have got the river and the railway, but we have no land carriage for an army, and he might keep on falling back to the great lakes, for anything that we could do to overtake him. So we all hope that Mahmud will retire to Omdurman without fighting, and with such a host as the Khalifa would then have, he would be certain to give battle before abandoning his capital."

"They are fine-looking fellows, these blacks," Gregory said.

"They are splendid fellows–they love fighting for fighting's sake. It is, in their opinion, the only worthy occupation for a man, and they have shown themselves worthy to fight by the side of our men. They have a perfect confidence in us, and would, I believe, go anywhere we led them. They say themselves, 'We are never afraid–just like English.'"

"There seem to be a good many women about the camps."

"Yes, their women follow them wherever they go. They cook for them, and generally look after them. They are as warlike as their husbands, and encourage them, when they go out to battle, with their applause and curious quavering cries. The men get very little pay; but as they are provided with rations, and draw a certain amount for the women, it costs next to nothing, and I fancy that having the wives with them pays well. I believe they would rather be killed than come back and face their reproaches.

"I could not wish to have more cheery or better fellows with me. They never grumble, they are always merry, and really they seem to be tireless. They practically give no trouble whatever, and it is good to see how they brighten up, when there is a chance of a fight."

"I hope I shall see them at it, before long," Gregory said. "Now I must be going, for I have to change, and put on my mess uniform before dinner. I am rather nervous about that, for I am not accustomed to dine with generals."

"You will find it all very pleasant," the other said. "Hunter is a splendid fellow, and is adored by his men. His staff are all comparatively young men, with none of the stiffness of the British staff officer about them. We are all young–there is scarcely a man with the rank of captain in the British Army out here. We are all majors or colonels in the Egyptian Army, but most of us are subalterns in our own regiments. It is good training for us. At home a subaltern is merely a machine to carry out orders; he is told to do this, and he does it; for him to think for himself would be a heinous offence. He is altogether without responsibility, and without initiative and, by the time he becomes a field officer, he is hidebound. He has never thought for himself, and he can't be expected to begin to do so, after working for twenty years like a machine.

"You will see, if we ever have a big war, that will be our weak point. If it wasn't for wars like this, and our little wars in India, where men do learn to think and take responsibility, I don't know where our general officers would get their training.

"Well, you must be going. Goodbye! We shall often meet. There are so few of us here, that we are always running against each other. I won't ask you to dine with us, for a few days. No doubt you would like to get accustomed to headquarters mess first. Of course, Hunter and the brigade staff dine together; while we have little regimental messes among ourselves, which I prefer. When there are only three or four of us, one can sit down in one's shirt sleeves, whereas at the brigade mess one must, of course, turn up in uniform, which in this climate is stifling."

The meal was a more pleasant one than Gregory had anticipated. On board the steamer he had, of course, dined with the other officers; and he found little difference here. Ten sat down, including the principal medical officer and a captain–the head of the station intelligence department, Major Wingate, being at present at Wady Halfa. Except for the roughness of the surroundings, it was like a regimental mess, and the presence of the General commanding in no way acted as a damper to the conversation.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.